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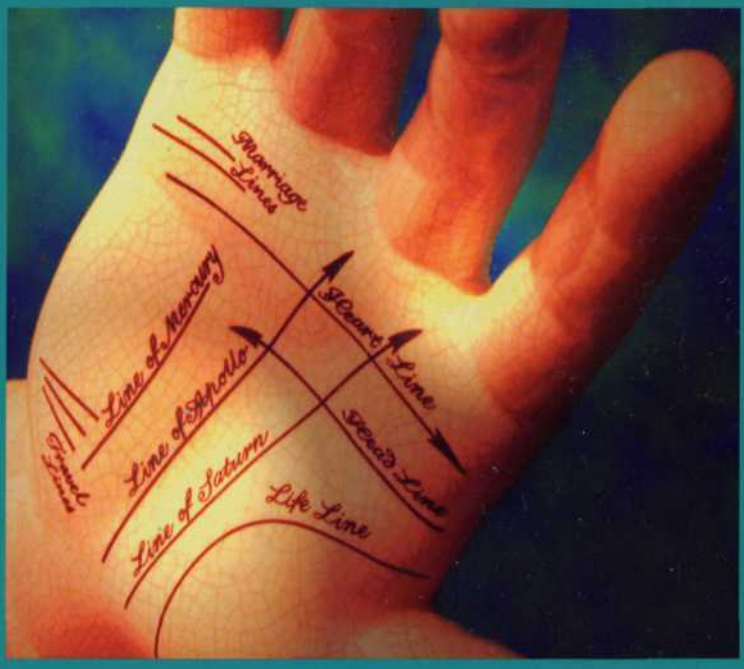

The Full Facts book of Cold Reading

by Ian Rowland

A comprehensive guide to the most persuasive psychological manipulation technique in the world and its application to psychic readings

3rd edition

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The Full Facts Book of Cold Reading

by

Ian Rowland

Third edition

Website: www.ianrowland.com

This book is dedicated with love to my Mother and Father, two exceptional, wonderful and admirable people.

The Full Facts Book of Cold Reading (third edition)

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Section One

Welcome to the Psychic Circus

"In the matters of religion, it is very hard to deceive a man, and very hard to undeceive him."

- Pierre Bayle. 'Dictionary'

Section 1: Welcome to the Psychic Circus

The Greatest Scam In History?

They are found throughout history.
They are found throughout the world.
And they defy explanation.

They are psychic readings, and everyone has either had one or knows someone who has. People find these readings astonishing, and with good reason, since they are often intriguing and incredible. Let me describe what happens.

You go to see a psychic - someone to whom you are a complete stranger. The psychic, usually female, describes your personality with pin-point accuracy. She identifies events in your past and present. Her reading may include the names of people you know, and specific facts about your personal life, *career,* and plans for the future. She refers to your innermost thoughts and problems, and provides wisdom and guidance which seems to make sense. She may also offer glimpses into the future which have an uncanny way of coming true.

This is a psychic reading, and it is the essence of today's psychic industry. Countless thousands have been moved, impressed and thrilled by such readings, and offer testimonials like this:

> *"I found my reading absolutely fantastic, I really enjoyed it. Everything that he said was absolutely spot on, and everything that he said that was going to happen to me seems absolutely fantastic. I was very impressed actually. He did a personality analysis on me and it was really right - spot on."*

There are many testimonials similar to the above. If sincere and enthusiastic testimony were an infallible guide to truth, then no-one could doubt the authenticity of psychic ability. But it is not. And it can.

The above is a real quote, from a real person. However, the reading she had been given was a complete sham. I know,

because I gave the reading, and there was nothing psychic about it. Instead, I used 'cold reading' - the psychologically deceptive technique which is the subject of this book.

A global industry, and growing

Glowing testimonials such as the one above are more or less the sole fuel of today's psychic industry. If people were not impressed by psychic readings, the industry could well collapse. But people are, and the industry is global and growing. Today, it enjoys unprecedented popularity thanks to TV 'infomercials', telemarketing and the internet.

As an industry, it may not yet be as big as oil, but it is older, will last longer, and is vastly more profitable. To profit from oil you have to find it, transport it, refine it and sell it. To profit from psychic readings, you just talk to people and they give you money. And whereas the world will one day run out of oil, it will never run out of people wanting a psychic reading.

It is hard to say exactly how much talking, and how much money, is involved. One source suggested in 1998 that the psychic network industry in the United States alone would soon be worth 1.4 to 2 *billion* dollars *[see Appendix note 1).* In England, where I live, the industry is similarly flourishing if not quite so well-developed. For one thing, our TV channels do not accommodate 30 minute 'infomercials'. This is one good reason for living here, and almost makes up for the fact that it rains a lot and nobody looks cheerful.

There are only two ways to account for all these readings, and all this money. Either the people giving the readings are genuinely psychic, or they are not. If they are psychic, their clients are paying for access to genuine psychic insight. If they are not, people are falling for a scam. And if this is true, then it is the biggest, most enduring and most popular scam of all time.

The great thing about cold reading, as far as its practitioners are concerned, is that hardly anyone knows about it. In an age when consumers are more cautious and informed than ever before, none of them know the first thing about cold reading. No *public book store in the world contains a single work on the subject.*

I cannot prove that psychics use cold reading. But I can give you all the information you need to decide for yourself. Welcome to the full facts about cold reading.

Overview: what you will find in this book

This book is in six sections.

You are currently reading **Section One.** This introduces you to the book and to cold reading. Please read this before you read anything else - it will avoid a lot of misunderstandings.

Section Two tells you how cold reading actually works.

Section Three features two examples of cold reading taken from my own TV demonstrations, including the full text of a reading I gave which was deemed to be "99.9%" accurate!

Section Four deals with Blocking, or making sure cold reading cannot be used on you.

Section Five provides some Additional Notes which, if I were a better writer, I would have found a place for in the main text.

Section Six explores how cold reading techniques might apply to other, non-psychic contexts.

The **Appendix** contains chapter notes, supplementary material and references.

I recommend that you read the sections in order, since later sections build on the information in earlier ones.

Online supplement

There is a section on my website which serves as an ongoing supplement to this book. It contains frequently asked questions, noted errors, additional information, useful feedback and so on. Your contributions are, of course, very welcome.

At the time of writing, my website can be found at: www.ianrowland.com .

Everything on the web is prone to change, so if the above address does not work then you will simply have to find me via your favourite search engine. Alternatively, find a freshwater pond at midnight, thrice recite the mystical incantation 'Jacqueline Bisset', and then touch this book to the water. My current website address will then form upon the surface of the pool in shimmering letters.

Three things this book is not about

This book is about cold reading. More specifically, it is about how someone who is not psychic can successfully pretend to be so, using cold reading. Let me mention three things this book is *not* about.

l.Do psychic powers really exist?

This book is *not* about whether genuine psychics exist. I leave you to decide this for yourself.

I get plenty of correspondence from people who are *absolutely positive* that psychic ability exists, and roughly as much again from people who are *absolutely positive* that psychic ability is moonshine. This debate has been going on forever, never goes anywhere, and never will. It is inherently sterile, not to say tedious.

In the unlikely event that anyone wants my opinion, based on over twenty years dabbling in the subject, I would say that in purely rational terms there is currently no good reason to believe in psychic ability. I believe that in every case of an individual claiming to have psychic ability, the psychic hypothesis is neither necessary nor sufficient.

However, the other answer I often give is that 'psychic powers are as real as you want them to be', which I think is true. To a person who *wants* to believe in psychic power, or any other chimera, the 'evidence' is whatever supports the belief, and anything else is deemed irrelevant.

2. Are psychic readings beneficial?

Some people defend psychic readings on the basis that people find them helpful or therapeutic. They suggest that whether or not readings are genuinely 'psychic' is perhaps unimportant, provided they do someone some good.

This is an interesting debate, but it has nothing to do with this book. I am exclusively concerned with whether someone giving a reading is using genuine psychic powers or cold reading. I hope that by reading this book you will have enough information to decide this for yourself.

3.Magicians and their methods

This book is *not* about the methods used by magicians, mind-readers, mentalists and the rest of my kind who practise dark,

deceptive arts purely for entertainment purposes.

You may have seen stage magicians who seem able to read the minds of complete strangers in the audience - telling them where they were born, their credit card numbers, where they went on holiday and so on. This is a neat enough routine, and I have done it myself more than a few times. There are many entertainers who specialise in similar miracles.

Do these kinds of magic tricks involve psychic ability? No. Stooges and confederates? Not usually, unless the performer is a poor exponent of his craft. So how *are* they done? Well, you will not find the answers here. After all, if you take away the secrets, you take away the magic, and that is not a fun thing to do.

With very rare exceptions, these stage tricks and mind-reading routines have little or nothing *whatsoever* to do with cold reading. What magicians do on stage is entertainment. This book is about deception used *outside* the sphere of entertainment. Please bear this distinction in mind. (*See Appendix note 2 for more on this point).*

Section Two

How Cold Reading works

"The power of accurate observation is often called cynicism by those who have not got it."

- George Bernard Shaw

Section 2: How Cold Reading works

Defining terms

What is cold reading?

Cold reading is a deceptive psychological strategy. Among other things, it can be used by someone who is not psychic to give what *seem* to be a very convincing psychic readings.

Cold reading is neither one single technique, nor one single procedure. It is better to think of 'cold reading' as the collective term for a set of techniques which can be used in different contexts to achieve different goals. In the first five sections of this book, I focus on the way cold reading techniques are used to deliver a convincing psychic reading to a complete stranger.

In the sixth and final section, I explore how these same techniques might apply to other, non-psychic contexts.

What is a psychic reading?

The psychic industry is vast, and accommodates many tastes.

At the junk food end of the market, there are instant phone readings which recycle lame pre-set scripts for every caller. The people doing the talking are trained to say the right things, promise the earth and, most of all, keep the customer on the line. These conveyor-belt miracles are cheap, quick, and offer mental nutrition on a par with Donald Duck cartoons. This may sound unfair, and it is. I apologise to Donald Duck cartoons.

At the haute cuisine end of the market are one-hour private consultations which cost the earth and deliver heaven on a stick. In the age of the personal trainer and the personal therapist, it should come as no surprise that those with a taste for designer life accessories can hire their very own slice of psy-chic. If presidents and royalty do it, it must be good, right?

To try and cover this rich and wondrous field, I have broken it down into a number of categories.

Readings categorised by type

There are many different types of psychic readings. Two of the most popular are:

Tarot. Readings supposedly based on the interpretation of tarot cards and their symbolic meanings.

Astrology. Based on the deliriously absurd creed that studying planets and other heavenly bodies can reveal influences on one's personality or future experience.

In these cases, the person giving the reading may not necessarily claim to be psychic as such. They may claim to have studied what they claim is a valid divinatory science, much as one might study medicine. Other examples in this category would include:

Palmistry. Based on the lines and other aspects of the palm of the hand.

Graphology. Based on a sample of handwriting. (Graphology should not be confused with handwriting analysis, which is a legitimate, well-accredited forensic science. Handwriting analysis is used, for example, to determine whether two samples of handwriting are from the same person).

Other types of readings are defined in terms of the specific psychic gift claimed by the person giving the reading. Among the more common ones are:

Mediumship. Based on supposed communication with people who have died or, to use the trade jargon, 'passed into spirit'. Also known as 'spiritualism'. Also known as 'exploiting bereaved and vulnerable people for financial gain'.

Clairvoyance. This terms is perhaps the most generally applicable of all, and hence the least easily defined. Clairvoyants claim to see or perceive information via psychic sensitivity to some form of energy, vibrations, or impressions. 'Clairaudience' is the equivalent term for those who claim their impressions come primarily in auditory rather than visual form. 'Clairsentience' is the impressively technical-sounding name which covers both of the above, or 'sensing' information.

Psychometry. Touching an object and claiming thereby to sense information about (a) the owner or (b) events involving

that object.

Crystal-ball gazing. Claiming to see or perceive impressions in an orb or similar prop made of crystal glass.

Aura readings. Based on what are said to be coloured human energy fields (wholly fictitious except in the mind of the practitioner) around a person's body.

Intuitive readings. Some psychics prefer to avoid any specific label, and claim only to have a form of loosely-defined intuitive gift, or perspective, which they believe puts them in a position to help people.

This list covers the most popular types of psychic readings, but there are many more besides.

Readings categorised by content

The content of readings varies considerably. For present purposes, it will suffice to list three main categories. In order of progressively greater scope, they are:

Health. Readings which focus primarily on issues of health and well-being. Aura readings often fall into this category. Other psychics may choose to specialise in this area e.g. reading the tarot specifically for health indications.

Personality & Character. Concerned not just with health but many other aspects of the client's character, personality and aptitude. For example, this is usually the case with graphology. These readings are sometimes graced with such elegantly pretentious names as 'a psychic character profile' or 'intuitive character analysis'. The nomenclature tends to be shaped by prevailing market trends.

General. Some psychics cover not just health and character, but also seem to perceive specific names, places, dates and events from the client's past, present and future. Clairvoyants usually fall into this category.

Readings categorised by delivery

Psychic readings are delivered in four basic ways.

One-to-one, in person. The most common form of psychic reading is a one-to-one encounter between the psychic and the client. This may take place at the psychic's own den of mystical

wonders, the client's own home, or at a psychic fair.

One-to-one, remote. The reading does not have to entail an actual meeting, since psychic services are available by phone, over the airwaves, by post, or via the internet.

Group readings. Psychics sometimes prepare readings for groups. For example, an astrologer may be asked to prepare a horoscope for a group of people deemed to have a common astrological chart (such as all the people in one sports team).

Public readings. Some of the more ambitious psychics give public demonstrations in front of large audiences. This is often the case with spiritualists.

Readings categorised by client

As well as there being many different types of psychics and psychic readings, there are different types of clients. The three commonest are:

Personal\Fun. There are people who go to psychics for no very specific reason. They may simply be intrigued to see what happens, or regard the whole venture as a bit of fun. Women who work in the same office often organise a group visit to a reader "for a laugh".

Personal\Problem. More commonly, people go to see psychics because they are looking for help with regard to a specific issue, worry or problem. This could be anything from advice on romantic or career issues to assistance finding some lost item of great sentimental value.

Corporate. Some companies employ psychics to assist with recruitment and promotion decisions, or other aspects of the company's well-being. This is alarmingly misguided, and could lead to all kinds of prejudice and unfairness.

Now that we have defined 'cold reading' and 'psychic readings', we can define the terms used in the rest of this book.

Terms used in this book

In this book I will use the term **'psychic reading'** to refer to any or all of the services described above under 'What is a psychic reading?'. The only common factor is the claim, stated or implied, that a person can provide meaningful personal information other than that which can be accounted for by (i) the normal human senses, i.e. senses regarded as non-controversial by the scientific establishment (ii) rational thought (iii) guesswork and luck.

I will use the term **'client'** to mean the person to whom the reading is given.

I will use the term **'psychic'** to mean anyone providing such a reading *and using cold reading to do so.* This point cannot be emphasised too much. Let us imagine for a moment that there are genuine psychics, and people who pretend to be psychic but just use cold reading. **This book is exclusively concerned with the activities of the second group.**

Incidentally, this book ought to be welcomed by genuine psychics, if there are any. It will help people to discriminate between authentic psychics, generously bestowing their gifts upon the world, and shameless fakes.

Five popular misconceptions

There are many misconceptions about cold reading. Here are five of the most common, which we may as well get out of the way before we study the actual workings. Each of these may *play a part* in cold reading, but they are far from the whole story.

1. Body language

Some people suggest that psychics base their readings on the so-called 'body language' of the client. In case you have been spared exposure to this 'science', body language is a popular term for the study of non-verbal communication, such as stance, facial expression, mannerisms and gestures.

Body language may play a part in cold reading, as we will see later, but it usually plays only a minor role. It plainly cannot help with remote readings (e.g. readings by phone or by post). Moreover, the body language theory cannot account for psychics coming up with names, dates, or details about the past.

At the risk of seeming sceptical about *everything* (which I am not), I might add that in my view body language is a very dubious 'science'. It seems to me that those aspects of body language which hold true tend to be obvious, while those which are not obvious are far from demonstrably true. However, this is not the place for a fuller discussion.

2. Shrewd observation

Some sceptics suggest that psychics rely on shrewd observation of the client to derive clues about character, career and interests. I feel this notion may owe a great deal to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. In these justly famous tales, the flamboyant detective sometimes demonstrates his ability to deduce many specific details about a person purely by shrewd observation.

This technique is indeed one factor in cold reading. Most cold readers have their own favourite tale of achieving an outstanding 'hit' through shrewd observation (I have mine, and we will get to it later). However, this method clearly does not offer a comprehensive mechanism for psychic readings. Some psychics give readings to clients over the radio, by phone, or by post. Others frequently produce information which could not feasibly be attributed to such clues.

I would like to add that in my experience, the potential for deducing information in this way is far more limited in real life than it is made to seem in fiction, or in sceptical literature about cold reading. However, even accepting that deductive observation can sometimes work very well, this is in some ways an irrelevance. Cold reading is not *primarily* concerned with providing accurate information, howsoever obtained. It is about applying a deceptive strategy to *appear* to provide information, when in fact there is little or none to offer.

3. Fishing for clues

Another popular theory holds that cold reading is all about 'fishing' for clues, which is to say trying to elucidate information from the client without this being obvious. There is an element of truth to this. Cold reading *can* involve subtle ruses to obtain information (as well as some which are as subtle as a dropped piano).

However, 'fishing' is simply one small part of the complete explanation. What is more, it is simply too bald a description for what is actually involved. The deception lies in the details of how the fishing is accomplished, and how the information obtained is then used in the context of the reading.

4. Vagueness and generalisation

Some people suggest psychic readings consist solely of vague and generalised statements that could mean almost anything. I am surprised how often this misleading theory is offered by people who should know better, including supposedly well-informed sceptics.

The 'vagueness' theory only holds good for the most trite and superficial aspects of the psychic industry. A perfect (and perfectly inane) example would be the horoscopes printed by newspapers which (a) cannot find anything better to print and (b) are content to treat their readers as superstitious idiots.

In all other cases, this theory does not hold water. Many cold readers give their clients very specific information, such as names, dates and detailed descriptions of people and places.

Later on this book, you will hear about a psychic who told a client the *exact* name of her brother - without guesswork, clues or prior information. In another case, a psychic accurately described

the rather unusual job a client did *26 years previously.* In both cases, I was the 'psychic' involved. How was I able to produce such 'amazingly' specific information? All will be revealed later.

5. Stupid, credulous and gullible?

There are those who suggest that anyone who consults a psychic, or believes in psychic readings, must be stupid, credulous or gullible. This is quite plainly at odds with the facts. There are countless clients who, by any criteria, are highly intelligent and perceptive people.

If you have a good grasp of how cold reading works, and how to block it, then it cannot be used on you. Otherwise, it can. It makes no difference how smart, highly-qualified or intellectually brilliant you may be. None of these qualities present any difficulty to a good cold reader.

Incidentally, the same is true of any kind of skilled deception. If you know how the deception works, then you cannot be deceived by it. If you do not know, then you can. A rocket-scientist can be fooled by a deceiver, because she knows about rocket science and not deception. Expertise in one field does not automatically transfer to another.

What is more, deception itself is an extremely vast and complex field. It can easily occupy a lifetime of study, and embraces many specialised arenas. Experts in one area (such as card manipulation or gambling scams) may know next to nothing about other areas (such as metal-bending and cold reading).

How the explanation is structured

The rest of this section is divided into seven sub-sections. They are:

The Set Up (next page). Techniques used by the psychic to get the session off to a good start, before the reading itself begins.

The Principal Themes. The themes which provide the framework for the reading.

The Elements of the Reading. The different kinds of statements and questions from which the reading is constructed. 38 different elements are described, divided into 4 chief groups.

The Win-Win Game. How the psychic can turn a 'miss' into a 'hit', and otherwise recover from errors.

Presentational Points. Aspects of presentation which can enhance the reading's effectiveness.

Putting It All Together. How the psychic weaves all the above into a successful reading.

Coping With Sceptics. How the psychic copes with highly sceptical or 'difficult' clients.

Notes about the explanation

The default example: one-on-one tarot

It would be impractical to relate *every* cold reading technique to *every* type of psychic consultation. I have therefore used a one-on-one tarot reading as my default example. The same principles and techniques can be adapted to deliver all the other types of readings listed earlier.

About the fictitious dialogues

Section Two features numerous dialogues between psychic and client. These dialogues are purely hypothetical, and intended to illustrate *typical* psychic readings. They are based chiefly on my own experience, plus information from other performers and researchers. Section Three, in contrast, contains transcripts of actual cold readings I have given.

About the female pronoun

Throughout this section I have used the female pronoun when referring to the psychic and the client. Male psychics and clients do exist, but they are very much in the minority.

Why are most clients women?

It is interesting to speculate why the great majority of clients are female. It has nothing to do with gullibility, and anyone spouting such views should be tied up in a sack and jumped up and down on until they promise to talk sense. I think there are two possible reasons. The first is that many social and cultural factors encourage women to credit themselves with 'intuitive' gifts. This in turn may make them more receptive to the notion of someone being able to know things which are, by normal means, unknowable.

Secondly, social and cultural factors also encourage men to cultivate an image of strength and independence, and to seek outside advice runs contrary to this image. Women are less prone to this type of insecurity, and are generally readier to consult others for guidance.

How it works 1/7: The Set Up

Before the reading itself begins, the cold reader can take some preliminary steps to get the reading off to a good start. The basic aim is to encourage a relaxed and co-operative atmosphere, in which the client will neither challenge nor impede the cold reading process. What follows is a list of some of the more common techniques for achieving this aim. Some psychics may use all of them, while others may only use one or two.

1. Meeting and greeting

Some psychics specialise in 'mail order' or remote readings, but the majority are in the business of meeting and greeting people. If the psychic is a naturally likeable person, then meeting and greeting clients presents no problem. Other psychics, less gifted with natural charisma, may employ a range of techniques designed to help first encounters go well.

There are many such techniques, and they tend to feature in books written for sales people and business negotiators. One excellent source is Nicholas Boothman's very readable book "How To Make Anyone Like You in 90 Seconds Or Less" *(pee Appendix note 3).*

A full and comprehensive treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this book. However, I would like to mention what I believe to be the single most important and effective technique of all: mind scripts.

A mind script is simply a short, simple and positive affirmation about the meeting. You *mentally* recite this to yourself as you prepare to meet someone, and continue to do so as the initial conversation gets under way. Here's a simple example:

> "I like you, you like me, this is going to go really well".

A young man embarking on that roller-coaster of hazard and joy, the 'first date', might usefully run a script that says something like this:

> "I like you, I'm the kind of guy you like, and we'll have a good time".

When you 'run' a mind script, you automatically make a big difference to the way you come across to the other person. A mind script can affect your posture and 'body language', tone of voice, facial expression, gestures and much else besides. It is

more or less impossible for the other person not to be affected by your choice of mind script.

In my opinion, mind scripts are very useful and effective. As such, I would not be at all surprised if a few psychics have learned to use them when meeting clients.

2. Encouraging co-operative interpretation

The psychic takes care to mention that the tarot is not an exact science - it involves some elements of *interpretation.* She might use other terms, such as 'intuitive understanding' or 'sensitivity'. The point is to foster the notion that both she and the client are supposed to *work together* and co-operate. For example, the psychic might say something like:

> "I won't necessarily always know exactly what the cards are trying to say. Sometimes, it's not very clear, like looking through a mist, and the exact meaning will actually be clearer to you than it is to me! So do bear that in mind, won't you?"

This encourages the client to see herself as an active participant in the reading, rather than a passive and mute recipient of the psychic's wisdom. The real point, obviously enough, is to encourage the client to volunteer information and to help the psychic get things right. Many clients require little persuasion to do this, and some turn out to be breathtakingly supportive. If the psychic offers a statement which is simply wrong, some clients actually *apologise* for not being able to see how it fits!

This is one of the most important aspects of the Set Up, and one which applies to many different kinds of psychic readings. The basic gist is always the same: the cards, stars, vibrations, spirit voices or whatever are less than 100% clear, *therefore* (stated) the client should help with the interpretation, and *therefore* (implied) the client should volunteer information as and when necessary.

3. Establishing an intimate atmosphere

The psychic tries to establish a fairly intimate atmosphere for reading. The specifics are largely a matter of personal style. The psychic might use a slightly softer voice than normal, or adopt a very sympathetic and non-confrontational stance to foster rapport. Anything which conveys a sense of welcoming calm is good.

Decoration and 'ambience' may also play a part. Psychics who operate from their own premises may give readings in a room specifically decorated for the purpose, featuring framed prints of a suitably mystical nature, soft lighting or candles, incense, relaxing 'ambient' music (i.e. music with the musical bits taken out) and so on. In effect, they are turning the reading into a theatrical performance, and setting the stage accordingly.

It would be wrong to suggest that all psychics go down this route. Some prefer to cultivate the clean-cut image of a professional business consultancy. To this end, they may use appropriate furnishings (e.g. big leather sofas that threaten to swallow you completely) and the props you find in a typical small office (e.g. out-of-date year planner, broken computer and a jammed photocopier).

No matter how this intimate atmosphere is created, the point is to dissuade the client from being too challenging or assertive. It also promotes the sense of participation in a **ritual.** Rituals are a time-honoured way of constraining normal mental responses (including the "Wait a minute, this is all nonsense" response) and thereby conditioning behaviour. This is why rituals are found in every religion and military organisation. The more time we invest in a ritual, the harder it becomes to break free of it.

4, Establishing psychic credentials

The psychic establishes her own credentials, and conveys the idea - explicitly or tacitly - that she is well-accredited, experienced and confident. There are many ways of doing this, some more obvious than others.

One of the commonest is to display testimonials from previous clients. Another is to display certificates from some palace of erudition such as the 'Something-somewhere Centre for Tarot Studies'. These testimonials and certificates may be genuine. Then again, in this day of desk-top publishing and 'instant print' shops, anyone can create and frame their own. I certainly did, and had great fun doing so.

Another neat ruse is to have a couple of appropriate reference books on hand, encouraging the idea that the tarot (or whatever the chosen discipline happens to be) is a vast field of study. It is a cute touch, in the course of a reading, to reach for some weighty reference tome in order to 'clarify' a fine point of interpretation!

One more way to boost credentials is to use good quality props. Tarot cards which are well-made, and beautifully illustrated, carry more conviction than ones resembling free prizes from a cereal packet. I prefer to use 'The Medieval Scapini Tarot' deck produced by U.S. Games Systems Inc., Stamford, Connecticut. The cards are beautiful, captivating and of excellent quality, and I endorse them wholeheartedly.

I should add that I have no connection with U.S. Games Systems, and this is an unbiased endorsement. That having been said, if U.S. Games Systems were appreciative of my comments, and offered me many free packs of cards (or large sums of money) as a charming gesture of goodwill, I should be happy to accept such tokens without compromising my integrity in any way. They might like to bear in mind that in future editions of this book my endorsements may have 'evolved' in the direction of *other* card companies who are, perhaps, a little more generous in their appreciation of my valuable judgements.

It can help to use cards which both look and feel as if they are very old. One way is to go to a card collector and actually buy cards which have plenty of miles on the clock, so to speak. The other is to get a new deck and artificially age the cards. Even the amateur forger's all-purpose ageing formula - a dip in cold weak tea plus gentle baking in the oven (the cards, not the forger) - can produce creditable results.

What the psychic actually says is also obviously a factor. In my own readings, I usually take care to 'casually' mention the many years I have studied 'my field', to hint at some of the VIPs who use my services, and to make veiled allusions to moving in exalted celebrity circles.

5. Establishing the belief system

As well as establishing her own credentials, as above, the psychic also establishes the credentials of the tarot, or whatever divinatory system is on offer. This leads the client to take the proceedings seriously, if not necessarily solemnly. For example, the psychic may refer to the tarot's long history, or to how well accredited it is, or to the many clients who have benefited from its insights.

Such remarks condition the client to respect the psychic proceedings, rather than waking up to how ludicrous they are. They steer the client to view the reading as a psychic experience,

involving some precious source of wisdom. In fact, the client is simply handing over hard cash to have someone talk to her.

This initial bolstering of the belief system also discourages awkward questions. It does not help proceedings if the client asks how 72 bits of pasteboard, bearing coloured drawings derived from medieval European sources, are supposed to shed any light on anything at all - let alone one's current romantic options and career prospects.

This aspect of the set up is continued during the reading itself, as we will see later. In passing, I should mention that this kind of ploy seems especially common among astrologers. Some of them drone on about everything from ancient Babylonians to famous politicians in such a way as to make one's ears bleed. However, most are smart enough to realise that boring the client to sleep within the first five minutes is not considered good technique.

6. Supplying a pre-emptive excuse for failure

In her introductory remarks, the psychic usually offers an up-front excuse for any outright failures which may arise later. She also makes it clear that she does not claim to get everything right all the time. For example, she might say something like:

> "I'll be honest enough to admit to you now that I do sometimes make mistakes. It would be wonderful to be absolutely spot on all the time, but after all, I'm only human, and I can only do my best for you. Do you understand?"

This appears endearingly honest, and guides the client to view the psychic's efforts sympathetically. It also prepares the client to help as much as possible (most clients do not take any pleasure in seeing the psychic struggle).

Said in a cheerful and appeasing way, such remarks can get readings off to a flying start. The real purpose, of course, is to make it easier for the psychic to retreat from any completely wrong statements that she makes in the course of the reading.

7. Checking for recent readings

The psychic asks if the client has had a reading before, and if so how long ago. The main reason for doing this is to avoid inadvertently giving conflicting readings to the same person! Provided two or three months have passed, any discrepancies between the last reading and the current one can be attributed to

changes in emphasis, interpretation or 'influence'.

The psychic may also take the trouble to mention that she uses a very unconventional system, or one that she herself has evolved over many years. This helps to cover up any discrepancies between what she says and what other psychics may have said.

8. Setting the client at ease

The psychic tries to be as welcoming, charming and innocuous as possible. She strives to establish a convivial and friendly rapport, and to get on friendly first-name terms if this is at all appropriate.

This may sound like nothing more than common courtesy, but it is not without purpose. The psychic wants to overcome any natural reserve and defensiveness the client may have, and to engender as much co-operation as possible. Some psychics, especially mediums and those whose work has a spiritual flavour, like to offer cute and endearing introductory statements along these lines:

> "May I welcome you in a spirit of love, and say how happy I am to share with you the gifts that come to us all from a higher source."

The psychic also watches out for any fear or anxiety that could obstruct rapport. For example, some clients are wary that the psychic will see too much (exposing darkest secrets!) or see bad news. It is a good idea for the psychic to try and eliminate such apprehension, like this:

> "Let me say right from the start that there's nothing to worry about. We're here to look at the positive trends in your life, and it's really all about helping you to make the most of what lies ahead. There may be a lot more good news than you realise! Of course, there's a mix of light and shade in everyone's life, I mean, that's reality, isn't it? But I like to concentrate on the sunshine rather than the rain, do you see what I mean?"

Progress Review

This concludes The Set Up. This is the first of seven sub-sections into which Section Two is divided. Next, the principal themes which psychic readings involve.

How it works 2/7: The Principal Themes

So far we have looked at how the psychic tries to set up the reading in a way which is likely to promote its success. The next stage is to actually start the reading itself.

Psychic readings consist of *themes* (what the psychic talks about) and *elements* (what she actually says). We will look the elements in the next section. Themes provide the underlying shape and structure for a reading, and ensure that it is relevant to the subject's life. Cold readers rely on four chief themes:

Love, romance and relationships

Money and material comforts

Career and progression

Health and well-being

There are also three minor themes. These are generally not as important as the main four, but they can prove very fruitful. They are:

Travel

Education and the pursuit of new knowledge

Ambitions, hopes and dreams

Note that 'Travel' can be interpreted literally ("A journey across water") or figuratively ("A voyage from loner to lover") as the psychic pleases.

These are the themes which experience has shown are most important, to most clients, most of the time. Now we can look at the actual elements of which the reading is composed.

How it works 3/7: The Elements of the Reading

So far we have looked at The Set Up, and the Principal Themes around which the reading is built. But what does the psychic actually say?

For very simple readings, the psychic may rely on what is more or less a set text, or limited variations on a largely unchanging script. However, such readings are seldom very convincing, and do not constitute cold reading in the true sense.

Cold reading does not involve a rehearsed script. It consists of numerous different *types* of statements (and questions) which can *appear* more significant or meaningful than they really are. I am going to call each type of statement an 'element'. The cumulative effect of these elements is to *create* the illusion that a reading of a psychic or mystical nature is taking place.

I am going to describe the 38 most useful and productive elements I know. I have given them pet names for ease of *reference* and readability, and divided them into four groups:

- about **character**
- about **facts** and events
- about **extracting information**
- about **predicting the future**

These are not meant to be hard and fast divisions. Some elements listed in one group could just as easily have been listed in another.

In reading about these elements, you may like to bear in mind that later sections deal with:

- what the psychic does if the elements do not work (The Win-Win Game')
- how *presentational* factors play their part ('Presentational Points')
- how the whole cold reading process comes together ('Putting It All Together')

Elements about character

This first group of elements are chiefly concerned with the client's personality and character.

1. The Rainbow Ruse

The Rainbow Ruse is a statement which credits the client with both a personality trait *and* its opposite. Here is an example:

> "You can be a very considerate person, very quick to provide for others, but there are times, if you are honest, when you recognise a selfish streak in yourself."

In this case, the client is being told that she is both selfless and selfish. There are countless variations along these lines - being both introvert and extrovert, shy and confident, responsible and irresponsible. It covers all the possibilities from one extreme to the other, just as a rainbow encompasses all the colours.

The Rainbow Ruse is a very common element in cold readings. It sounds good, seems perceptive, and wins a good response from most clients. Here is another example:

> "I would say that on the whole you can be rather a quiet, self-effacing type, but when the circumstances are right, you can be quite the life and soul of the party if the mood strikes you."

These kinds of statements are not hard to make up. First, the psychic thinks of a common personality trait. Then she describes the client as both having, and lacking, this quality. Finally, she joins the two halves in a single statement with some reference to time, context, mood or potential. The example given above uses the link "when the circumstances are right". Other good links are "at other times" and "yet you also have the potential to be".

As well as being simple and effective, this element also affords plenty of scope for some gentle humour aimed at typical human failings. Here is an example:

> "There is an inherent capacity here for neatness and tidiness and order, which is to your credit, but at the same time I can see some indications that this capacity does not always prevail, and you can, in some circumstances - mmm, how shall I put this delicately? - appear a little deserted by this instinct?!"

Rainbow Ruse statements are wonderfully safe, since the majority of personality traits are neither static nor quantifiable. Very few people are outgoing *all* the time, or introverted *all* the time. Most of us manifest both tendencies from time to time according to

circumstances. What is more, there is no objective way to assess where one lies on the graduated scale between extremes of outgoing/introvert behaviour.

Avoiding the quantifiable

The lack of any quantifiable refutation is an important aspect of the Rainbow Ruse. These types of statement do not really work when dealing with quantifiable characteristics.

To see what I mean, imagine that in the course of a reading an inexperienced cold reader decides to touch on career issues. She might decide to comment on the client's facility with computers and new technology:

> "There are indications here that you are in tune with the modern world, and that new technological developments - computers, the internet and suchlike - hold few fears for you. However, at times you have found this area quite daunting. Like many people, the era of the microchip has occasionally left you baffled."

This is a perfect Rainbow Ruse in terms of *structure,* but it is flawed. The trait under discussion is quantifiable, and hence susceptible to factual refutation. The client might reply:

> *"Actually, I've been running a data processing department for fifteen years, and I lecture on emerging technologies in my spare time. I've never found it daunting in the slightest."*

This obvious error need not concern the psychic, since there are many ways of getting out of it (we will look at this later, in 'The Win-Win Game'). Nonetheless, this admittedly unlikely example illustrates why the Rainbow Ruse element is usually applied to less quantifiable characteristics. It also illustrates the need to couch psychic readings in terms of potential and capacity, rather than actuality and fact.

2. Fine Flattery

Fine Flattery statements are designed to flatter the client in a subtle way likely to win agreement. Usually, the formula involves the client being compared to "people in general" or "most of those around you", and being declared a slight but significant improvement over them. Consider this bad example:

> "You are wonderfully honest!"

This is certainly flattering, and it may even be true, but it is a very poor piece of cold reading. The first problem is that it looks and

sounds like pure flattery, because that is all it is. Most people are suspicious of this kind of blatant flattery and reject it out of hand. Secondly, it lacks any relevance to the psychic system which is - in theory - being used. Thirdly, it omits the reference to other people. It is just too dull to sound as if it carries any great insight.

The same statement can easily be turned into a successful piece of Fine Flattery. Suppose the psychic has been given a watch that belongs to someone, and is giving a psychometric reading (a character reading supposedly based on an article owned or used by the client). It might go something like this:

> "What I sense here is that the owner of this article is someone who can generally be trusted. I'd say perhaps this person is that little bit more honest and conscientious than many people tend to be. Not a saint, not perfect, but let's just say that when it really matters, this is someone who does understand the importance of being trustworthy. I feel an energy suggesting this person has good values which they try to live up to, although it has to be said they perhaps don't always succeed."

This entire spiel amounts to "You're basically honest". However, it *sounds* as if it is psychic in nature, full of insight, and a perceptive statement about a specific individual.

Honesty is a good characteristic to use as the basis for a Fine Flattery element, since the vast majority of people are inclined to think of themselves as honest. Several other personality traits can be used in the same way. Among the more reliable are:

- being hard-working and diligent
- conscientious
- fair-minded
- warm and loving
- independent

I must give special mention to two characteristics which are Fine Flattery gold dust. They always work, always impress, and can carry a thin reading a long way. I have learned to keep them in reserve at all times, like emergency parachutes. Here they are:

- being wise in the ways of the world, a wisdom gained through hard experience rather than 'book learning'
- knowing how to be a good friend

Just for the sake of another example, here is how a spirit medium might apply the same element. Suppose that the medium is, so

she pretends, receiving messages from a deceased relative, and that the Fine Flattery is based on "You are wise". It might come out sounding something like this:

> "...I have your late sister with me now. She tells me she wants you to know that she always admired you, even if she didn't always express it well. She tells me that you are... wait, it's coming through... yes, I see, she says you are in many ways more shrewd, or perceptive, than people might think. She says she always thought of you as quite a wise person, not necessarily to do with book-learning and examinations. She's telling me she means wise in the ways of the world, and in ways that can't be said of everyone. She's laughing a little now, because she says this is wisdom that you have sometimes had to learn the hard way! She says you are intelligent enough to see that wisdom comes in many forms."

A cute touch is to flatter the client in ways which ease the cold reading process itself. For example, if the psychic flatters the client as being very "open-minded", this increases the chances that the client will accept the reality of psychic ability in general.

3. The Psychic Credit

Psychic Credits are character statements which credit the client with some form of psychic or intuitive gift, or at the very least a receptivity to others who possess such gifts. This may be seen as a very specific application of Fine Flattery. It is a very common element, found in all sorts of readings.

As with the Fine Flattery element, it is not good enough to simply praise the client and hope she likes it. "Hey! You're psychic too!" is not the recommended approach. Here is an example of the sort of thing a tarot reader might say:

> "This card, the King of Wands, is generally indicative of a perceptive or even a psychic ability of some kind. Of course we all have these gifts, but they do vary from person to person. In your case, it's the second card in the higher triad, which is devoted to your personal profile. This suggests you have very strong and vivid intuitive gifts, and good instincts which will serve you well if you learn to trust them. Since you also have the Eight of Coins in support of the same line, I would say that you have a very fine, almost psychic kind of acumen when it comes to dealing with material goods and financial affairs. You can perceive value in ways that not everyone else can."

Just in case some clarification is required here, the above hypothetical example is full of what I later call the 'Jargon Blitz'. I have no idea what the King of Wands and Eight of Coins are

supposed to mean, and phrases like 'higher triad' and 'in support of the same line' are just made-up nonsense. However, they *sound* good, which is all that really matters.

The Psychic Credit is very widely deployed in many different readings. Rare indeed is the psychic who would inform a client that she *lacks* this kind of faculty. The Psychic Credit is often accompanied by little "proofs" which can go like this:

> "There is an indication that you have quite a well-developed psychic sense in your own right. You're probably the type of person who will be thinking about someone you haven't heard from in a while, and then out of the blue they phone you at that very moment!"

Many clients readily confirm that this kind of thing has happened to them, and it may well have done. However, as sceptics never tire of telling us, it is far from evidence of psychic intuition. You probably think about people you know fairly often, and you probably *receive* many phone calls. Usually, there's no link and you don't think twice about it. When, by chance, the person in your thoughts *does* call, it seems surprising and you remember the incident.

Male and female psychic credits

There are many similar anecdotal offerings which can lure clients into crediting themselves with psychic sensitivity. Here is a fairly common one which is offered to female clients:

> "You probably have innate psychic sensitivity which plays little tricks on you all the time. The sort of thing where you feel you ought to do your face and smarten up your make-up for no reason, and then suddenly there's a knock on the door and it turns out to be someone you're really glad you looked your best for."

For male clients, the Psychic Credit may be expressed in a slightly different form to exploit typical male ego triggers:

> "We all have some psychic acumen, and this is true of you, even though you're very down to earth and pragmatic. You're very shrewd in your dealings with people. You can read people very well, like a sort of sixth-sense that is more developed in you than in most people. You make a very good businessman or negotiator. Your intuitive side means you have a lot more rapport with women than many men, and this is a characteristic which, whether or not you realise it, a lot of women find very appealing about you."

The Psychic Credit is a very dependable cold reading element, and has the obvious additional benefit of bolstering the belief system which supports psychic readings (which we saw is part of The Set Up, 'Establishing the belief system').

4. Sugar Lumps

Sugar Lump statements offer the client a pleasant emotional reward in return for believing in the junk on offer. In general, the Sugar Lump relates to the client's willingness to embrace the psychic 'discipline' involved in the reading, and to benefit from the insights thereby gloriously revealed:

> "Your heart is good, and you relate to people in a very warm and loving way. The tarot often relates more to feelings and intuition than to cold facts, and your own very strong intuitive sense could be one reason why the tarot seems to work especially well for you. The impressions I get are much stronger with you than with many of my clients."

It is more or less mandatory to praise the client for being "open-minded" and "receptive to many different kinds of wisdom". This is as sly as it is insidious, since the more the client is disposed to believe in the nonsense being sold, the easier it is to (a) send her away happy and (b) keep her coming back for more.

Sugar Lumps can also be used to weaken resistance to psychic nonsense, or to soften sceptical attitudes. In these cases, the Sugar Lump is modified to point out what a nice, loveable person the client *could* be, if only she would be less sceptical. It might go something like this:

> "I feel in some ways that you have become very defensive, almost as if you're locked up in your own secure little castle. This is a shame, because you're blocking yourself off from a lot of light, and love, that could be yours. There are indications here of a need to learn to take a broader look at life, and to be more open to new ideas - even if they may seem strange at first. You know, you won't come to any harm if you lower your defences a little, and take a peek at the insights on offer. Who knows, you might find a few of the answers you've been looking for!"

This is no more than an emotional punch in the face (albeit very sweetly delivered), exploiting the natural human desire to be accepted and loved. The Sugar Lump may also stress how negative it is to doubt, to question or to disbelieve. In addition, the psychic may be inclined to throw in a little science-trashing just for added effect. It is all good for trade.

5. **The** Jacques Statement

This element consists of a character statement based on the different phases of life which we all pass through. It is named after Jacques in Shakespeare's 'As You Like It', who gives the famous 'Seven ages of man' speech.

Jacques Statements are derived from common rites of passage, widely-recognised life patterns, and typical problems which we all encounter on the road to mature adulthood. In this context, many cold reading sources refer to a book called 'Passages' written in 1976 by award-winning New York author and journalist Gail Sheehy (see *Appendix note* 4). This exceptional book analyses what Sheehy has dubbed "the predictable crises of adult life", and remains the pre-eminent reference work for anyone wishing to study this territory for cold reading or any other purpose. My own copy is very well-thumbed.

Here is an example of a Jacques Statement, taken from my own tarot, astrological and clairvoyant readings. It is most appropriate for someone in their mid- to late thirties or early forties:

> "If you are honest about it, you often get to wondering what happened to all those dreams you had when you were younger; all those wonderful ambitions you held dear, and plans which once mattered to you. I suspect that deep down, there is a part of you that sometimes wants to just scrap everything, get out of the rut, and start over again - this time doing things your way."

Like many of the elements listed here, the Jacques Statement may seem rather lame on the printed page. However, in the context of a supposedly psychic reading, with the correct presentation and vocal delivery, it can be highly effective. Many clients on the receiving end respond with open-mouthed amazement that the cards (or stars, or handwriting etc.) can so accurately reflect their life and pre-occupations.

The Frustrated Talent

Here is another Jacques Statement which is suitable for a younger adult, say in her early twenties, who is probably still developing her career:

> "If you are honest about it, you often feel a sense of frustration that your own ideas and talents and abilities aren't given their full recognition. There have been more than one or two occasions when you had to struggle to get people to let you show what you can do. While you are mature enough to

recognise that you have plenty to learn, and are willing to put the time in to learn new skills, you often find other people too set in their ways, and unable to appreciate the contribution you could make - if only they would let you".

This element is applicable to many kinds of psychic readings. I know from experience that it sits very well in a tarot or astrological reading. I am the first to admit that many of the elements listed here are far from guaranteed, and can go wrong (hence the later section on getting out of trouble, 'The Win-Win Game'). However, a well-delivered Jacques Statement rarely meets with anything but wholehearted agreement.

6. Greener Grass

The Greener Grass element is based on the fact that we all retain some fascination with the options in life that we did *not* take. You could say they form their own sub-set of the Jacques Statements referred to above.

There are many examples of these fundamental life choices. People who have always lived in congested, urban areas often yearn for what they see as the peace and freedom of a more rustic way of life. Conversely, those who have spent all their years in the countryside may long for, or at least be curious about, the ease, convenience and (reported) excitement of urban life. Few of us go through life without sometimes suspecting the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.

The office denizen, locked into a fixed and rather dull routine, often develops a craving for more variety, and a heightened pace of change. Conversely, the high-achieving jet-setter, rarely spending two days in the same country, may yearn for more stability and some respite from airports (and airline food), hotels and long-distance calls.

And so it goes on. Life involves making finite choices from infinite options, and all of us are prone to wondering what would have happened if we had chosen differently. For example, suppose the client appears to have all the trappings of a successful executive *career.* The psychic might say something along these lines:

"I see indications of material success and professional advancement which are a credit to you, and which reflect your own drive and ability to get things done. You are the sort of person who delivers results, and this characteristic has brought its rewards.

However, it has also brought its penalties. Although you would not necessarily advertise them too openly, I sense some feelings here of a potential desire for more domestic security, and a more stable home life. I would not go so far as to say this has been a serious problem for you, but I believe your loyalty to your career has not always delivered the returns you expected.

I sense that from time to time, you find yourself contemplating your more domestic instincts, and wondering if they could perhaps be allowed more room to flourish. I think this has been an area of conflict within you, and I foresee that you will take steps to resolve this issue within the next 18 months or so."

Now imagine a client who comes across as a contented housewife, whose every waking hour revolves around her home and family. Here is the same Greener Grass statement as before, turned on its head:

"I see indications of strong domestic instincts which have been allowed to flourish, and which have brought you a sense of security and stability which is a source of great strength to you, and also very much to your credit. Not everyone can be a good home-maker, but you can, and you are.

However, the stability and the stimulation of family life has also brought its penalties. Although you would not necessarily advertise them too openly, I sense some feelings here of a potential desire for more career progress, or at least being able to find expression and fulfilment beyond the four walls of your home. I would not go so far as to say this has been a serious problem for you, but I believe your loyalty to your home and family has not always delivered the returns you expected.

I sense that from time to time you find yourself contemplating your more professional or academic instincts, and wondering if they could perhaps be allowed more room to flourish. I think this has been an area of conflict within you, and I foresee that you will take steps to resolve this issue within the next 18 months or so."

You can see that this is precisely the same patter as before, but re-directed to flow in the right direction. Although trite in the extreme, it smacks of genuine psychic insight and the wisdom of the ancients helpfully distilled.

Greener Grass statements have always been a fixed part of my cold reading repertoire. I enjoy making them up, and I find they work well. They are also very good for 'padding out' a thin section of a reading, since they tend to expand to anecdotal length, and offer many opportunities for extemporisation.

7. Barnum Statements

These are artfully generalised character statements which a majority of people, if asked, will consider to be a reasonably accurate description of themselves. Here is a selection:

"You have a strong need for people to like and respect you."

"You tend to feel you have a lot of unused capacity, and that people don't always give you full credit for your abilities."

"Some of your hopes and goals tend to be pretty unrealistic."

"You are an independent and original thinker; you don't just accept what people tell you to believe."

The name derives from P.T. Barnum, a legendary showman and circus-owner, who was said to have 'something to please everybody'. Barnum statements have been the subject of a number of studies conducted by psychologists. In one study, students were given what they were told were individual astrological readings, based on their birth dates and star signs. They were then asked to rate the accuracy of the readings. The great majority of the students rated their readings as highly accurate. Only then was it revealed that in fact the 'readings' were all identical. The all-purpose reading merely consisted of several Barnum Statements strung together. (See *Appendix note 5 for references.)*

Obviously, a reading made up in this way would be rather limited in scope. However, it would be perfectly adequate for some situations.

I have seen more than one article in sceptical literature suggesting that cold reading consists largely of Barnum Statements. This is highly misleading. Barnum Statements may be useful as a way to establish some initial rapport between the psychic and the client, but they are too generalised to sustain a reading of any depth and detail.

Barnum statements and 'forking'

It is possible to get more mileage out of Barnum Statements by combining them with a technique called 'Forking'. We will look at this technique later, under Presentational Points, but let me briefly explain it here.

Take a simple Barnum Statement, like this:

"You tend to be quite self-critical."

If the client seems to be broadly in agreement with this, the psychic can develop and strengthen the idea:

> "You often give yourself quite a hard time over mistakes and shortcomings which perhaps other people wouldn't worry about. You have a tendency to be your own worst enemy in this regard, and this self-critical side to your character has held you back on more than one occasion."

On the other hand, if the client seems to reject the initial statement, the psychic can develop the *same* theme in the *opposite* direction, like this:

> "But this tendency is one you have learned to overcome, and these days it rarely comes to the fore. You have learned to accept yourself, and to be reconciled with your own special mix of gifts and skills. You have learned how damaging it can be to be too self-critical, and all credit to you for having matured past the self-critical stage."

In other words, the psychic is prepared to follow each Barnum Statement with one of two supplementary statements, either to strengthen the initial idea or reverse it. In this way, plain and simple Barnum Statements can provide the basis for some relatively sophisticated readings.

Progress Review

This concludes the first group of elements, which concerned character and personality. Now we can move on to the second group, concerning facts and events in the client's life.

Elements about facts and events

These elements chiefly concern facts (such as names and numbers) which mean something to the client, and events in the client's distant or recent past. Elements which deal with future events are dealt with separately (see 'Mainly about the future' later).

1. **The** Fuzzy **Fact**

A Fuzzy Fact is an apparently factual statement which is formulated so that (a) it is quite likely to be accepted (b) it leaves plenty of scope to be developed into something more specific. Let us consider some common examples.

Geographical

Here is a typical example that might form part of a tarot reading, assuming the reading is taking place somewhere in the United States:

> "I can see a connection with Europe, possibly Britain, or it could be the warmer, Mediterranean part?".

This example obviously varies with the geographical context of the reading. In Britain, the line could be "...a connection with America" or "Australia, possibly New Zealand". The essential idea is to specify a large, distant part of the world with which the client may well have some sort of connection.

Note that the psychic has not said whether this link is professional, social, domestic or romantic. She has not specified any particular part of Europe, which is a vast place (likewise America, or Australia). She has not said if the connection is current or past or in the future.

However, if the client has *any connection at all* with the named part of the world, no matter how vague, she can be encouraged to supply the requisite details, for instance that her husband's family once lived there. The psychic then builds on this feedback to massage the initially vague statement into something more specific.

The example given above might be massaged like this:

> "I can see a connection with Europe, possibly Britain, or it could be the warmer, Mediterranean part. Now why might this impression be coming through?"
>
> *"Could that include Scotland?"*

"The link I'm getting seems to have that sort of a Celtic flavour to it, but I wasn't sure, I'm getting Edinburgh for some reason..."

"There is a link on my father's side. His family comes from Scotland but it's not Edinburgh."

"Well, maybe that's just a place that he or his family visited once or twice... but I'm definitely getting a link with that part of the world, and connection by blood and by marriage is indicated, so that makes sense to you does it?"

'Yes, definitely."

Thus the psychic shapes the initial vagueness into something much more specific. This is not just useful during the reading itself. It also affects how the reading is remembered afterwards. A statement such as this:

"I can see a connection with Europe, possibly Britain, or it could be the warmer, Mediterranean part"

can become mis-remembered like this:

"I see a family connection, on your father's side, with Scotland, maybe Perthshire".

Obviously, the mis-remembered version is far more impressive than the actual statement the psychic originally made. I will have more to say about developing statements into miracles later on, in the section on Presentational Points.

The fact that clients often remember what was said inaccurately is well-known to sceptics. Non-believers are often challenged to "explain" how a particular psychic could have delivered some piece of devastatingly accurate information. Of course it is the tidied-up, specific version which is offered for analysis, not the Fuzzy Fact which was originally given.

Medical

This particular version of the Fuzzy Fact is often found in spiritualist readings. For example, if the medium is pretending to receive information about how someone passed into spirit (died), she might say something like this:

"...and I'm getting an indication of a problem around the chest area, it could be sort of here (gestures vaguely towards heart and lungs)."

This stands a very high chance of being correct. A great many people die of illnesses directly related to the heart and lungs.

However, the chances of a hit are even better than they may seem, given the rather loose way in which readings tend to be assessed. For example, if the person died because of kidney failure, the psychic could claim (legitimately) that this obviously affected circulation, which is related to the functioning of the heart. Hence the initial statement is interpreted to be at least as right as it is wrong.

This particular version of the Fuzzy Fact can also be massaged in other ways. If the client claims that this statement about the "chest area" is wrong, the psychic may develop the statement like this:

> "Oh, that's strange because the chest area is the clear impression I'm getting. How did he pass, my dear?"
>
> *"It was a sudden car accident - he was killed instantly."*
>
> "Ah yes, I see now. What he's saying to me is that the accident triggered a heart attack just the split second before he passed over."

Once again, the psychic wins.

Many psychics give readings which incorporate a degree of health diagnosis, even if this is not their main focus. For example, a graphologist or a tarot reader might well say:

> "Mmm, and I sense a bit of back trouble now and again?"

As is commonly known, the great majority of people have *some* experience of *some* sort of back problem at *some* point in their lives. Since this might involve the spine itself, the muscles, or the skin in that area, there is plenty of scope for a hit.

Factual

Yet another version of the Fuzzy Fact relates to facts and events. Here is an example that might form part of an astrological reading:

> "Now, there's an indication here of a career in progress, or a transition. This could be you, or someone's career that affects you."

This bears the twin hallmarks of the Fuzzy Fact: it is quite likely to be right, and it leaves plenty of scope for refinement into something more specific. The psychic does not say what is meant by "progress" or "transition". It could be taken to mean getting a job, losing a job, promotion, demotion, relocation to a new office, a bonus, a pay rise, a change of responsibilities, getting a

new client or a new account... all sorts of things. Even the *possibility* of any of these things will count as a hit - they do not actually need to have happened.

Given that the psychic says this could refer to either the client or someone she knows, it stands a very high chance of being counted as a hit, and of being remembered as much more specific than it really was.

Another common example which often features in the spiritualist repertoire is the "uniform". With reference to some late member of the family, the gifted medium might say:

> "And I'm getting a link with a uniform of some kind. Now does this make sense to you?"

Many people have jobs which involve wearing a uniform, or wearing something which is *effectively* a uniform in the context of their work (such as the executive's smart suit, or the butcher's apron). If the deceased belongs to this category, it's a hit!

Moreover, many who do not wear a uniform themselves nonetheless work in places where others do, and this form the basis for a hit. The potential for success does not end there. Many people have served in the armed forces at some point, so this provides yet more scope for a potential miracle. If all else fails, the psychic can say she is tuning in to the deceased's school days (when they may have had to wear a uniform) or youthful years (when they may have been into sports, and wore "uniforms" or team colours).

I have dwelt at length on the Fuzzy Fact because it is a very common element, with applications to many different kinds of cold reading. It can be used to generate statements about relationships, family, career, names of people or places or events, sets of initials, numbers, trips, holidays and celebrations.

It is the widespread use of the Fuzzy Fact which has probably given rise to the notion that cold reading consists of vague statements (see 'Vagueness and generalisation'). It bears repeating that it is not just vagueness that makes this element work - it is the high likelihood of being right *in some way*, and the scope it offers for refinement into something more precise.

By its very nature, this element is mostly applicable to interactive readings. However, it can be used in printed or postal readings, in which case the client herself has to do all the work of finding a way to make the statement fit. Fortunately for the psychic

industry, many clients are happy to oblige.

2. The Good Chance Guess

This element involves making a guess which stands a higher chance of being right than you might think. (It is distinct from the outright fluke, or Lucky Guess, which we will look at next).

To take a very common example, the psychic might say something like:

"And at the house where you live, is there a 2 in the number?"

This sounds like an outright guess, and in some ways it is. But the odds of the psychic being right are far higher than you might think. What's more, the majority of clients lack either the mathematical sophistication, or inclination, to work out the correct odds.

Let us investigate this a little more closely. Imagine a street with 100 houses, 50 on either side. How many houses have a 2 in their-number? The answer is on the next page, but make a mental guess before you look.

* (pause for thought) *

The correct answer is 19, very close to one fifth of all the houses in the street. So the psychic has almost a 1 in 5 chance of being right. (The probability increases for streets with more than 19 houses but significantly fewer than 100, which in practice applies to a high proportion of streets.)

Good though this is, there is plenty more honey in the pot. If the client rejects this initial offering, the psychic might try widening it just slightly, like this:

> "Oh, that's strange... because I'm seeing this number 2. Perhaps it's the house next door...?"

If we go back to our imaginary street of 100 houses, 20 of them (not among the 19 counted so far) are adjacent to a house with a 2 in the number. Therefore the psychic would get a hit if the client lived at any one of 19 + 20 houses, which is 39 in all. The possibilities do not end there. If the "house next door" ploy has not worked, the psychic can always smoothly extrapolate like this:

> "...or maybe it's the house you see opposite every morning."

This adds 8 more houses of those not counted so far. Which makes a grand total of 47 houses, or almost a 50% chance of getting a hit! (If it is still a miss, the psychic uses one of the escape routes we will see later in 'The Win-Win Game').

The blue car

Here is another very common instance of the Good Chance Guess:

> "And for some reason I'm seeing a blue car outside your door."

This combines some pure guesswork with some intelligent thinking. The chances of getting a hit are much higher than may initially appear. If the client owns or drives a blue car, it is a hit. If she has ever done so, then it is a hit about her past. With just a little refinement, the psychic can get a hit if any of the client's close friends or neighbours have a blue car. Or, if the client has recently been visited by any trade or professional people in a blue car or van, that also counts as a hit. When you think about the possibilities, you can see the chances of a hit are quite high.

The other crafty part of this guess is the choice of colour. Cars come in many colours and shades, but blue is probably the most common of all. What is more, the term "blue" covers a greater possible range of shades and hues than any other possible choice - from the deep, dark shades of Royal Blue to light cyan and

intermediate shades such as aquamarine and turquoise.

There are many other statements which work in the same way as these two examples. Technically, they are guesses which may be right or wrong, but in fact they stand a very good chance of being right. It is also worth pointing out that in most contexts, the clients will have little or no time to analyse the subtlety involved.

3. The Lucky Guess

The Lucky Guess element is exactly that - a pure guess which lacks any of the subtlety of the "Good Chance Guess" explained above. The psychic simply offers a name, set of initials, date or place and sees if the client accepts it.

If it is a hit, it seems miraculous and will be sure to impress the client. What is more, it can be used afterwards to give sceptics a thump, since it is apparently inexplicable. If it is not a hit, the psychic can easily move on to something else (see 'The Win-Win Game').

Although there is nothing subtle about this element, it needs mentioning since it is so useful in cold reading terms. It is also worth emphasising that many clients apply great latitude when interpreting the psychic's offerings. The same sort of ambiguity which helps Fuzzy Facts to become specific hits also helps Lucky Guesses. Take an example like this:

> "The name Jane means something to you. I can see someone you have known quite a while, with blonde hair".

The psychic is simply guessing. However, she has not said anything specific about how the name relates to the client, so more or less any connection will do. "Jane" could be a relative, a professional colleague or a friend. She could be alive or dead, known well or only distantly, linked with the present or the past. There are endless possibilities for this guess to count as a hit.

If the client knows a Jean, Jenny, Janet, Joanne or someone whose name sounds close, she may well offer the mild correction and credit the psychic with a near-miss. This close-sounding name could be a first name, surname ("Jones") or a nick name. It could be male or female ("Jan" is a common male name in some countries). Once you appreciate the interpretative latitude which psychics enjoy, it becomes clear that a Lucky Guess stands at least a fair chance of eventually being considered as a hit.

The three-part guess

It is also worth pointing out that if a guess is composed of two or three parts, the client is likely to pay attention only to those parts which are correct. In the example given above, the guess contains three parts: "Jane", "known a long time" and "blonde hair". If the client has recently met a Jane with blonde hair, this will be considered a remarkable display of psychic divination. The inaccurate part (about having known her a long time) will be overlooked. Similarly, if the client has known someone with blonde hair for a long time, the psychic will be given some credit even if this person is not called Jane or anything like it.

The same applies to any guess consisting of multiple parts. Only the bits that fit get remembered. For this reason, many cold readers make sure their Lucky Guesses always consist of two or more parts.

Here is another example of a three-part Lucky Guess:

> "Now for some reason I'm seeing significance with the end of August, something like the late twenties, the twenty-sixth of August, maybe a date close to that, and a man, related to you, who wears glasses."

If the client is married to a bespectacled man whose birthday is August 27th, the psychic will be credited with astounding powers which science is powerless to explain. However, the guess affords plenty of scope for at least partial success.

The date could be more or less anything from the 24th of August to the end of the month. It could refer to a birthday, an anniversary, a holiday, a social function or an important decision. It could be significant every year, or just last year or just this year. It could be significant personally, socially or professionally.

The man could be a husband, partner, brother, relative, friend, colleague or a professional contact (such as the client's doctor or accountant or garage mechanic). He could be someone the client has known for years, or met once. Alive or dead, near or far, well-known or a distant acquaintance. The more possibilities you become aware of, the more chances you see for the Lucky Guess to be sufficiently correct, in one way or another, to constitute a hit.

Of course, the more Lucky Guesses the psychic includes, the higher her chances of getting a hit somewhere along the line. Some psychics manage to mention dozens of different names, sets of initials, dates or places in a single reading. The misses get

forgotten. The hits are the ones that impress the client, and get talked about afterwards.

In my own readings, I have found it worthwhile to use the Lucky Guess element very sparingly, just in case the client gets suspicious of the technique. However, I generally include at least one, and usually two, in every reading. If it happens to be a hit, it is an inexplicable miracle and highly impressive. If not, it is soon forgotten.

When they work, Lucky Guesses provide very useful re-enforcement of belief both for the psychic (who wishes to convey the impression that she is genuine) and the client (who does not wish to believe she has given her time, money and trust to a fake).

Habitual guessing

I should just add that many cold readers get into the habit of using Lucky Guesses even when not giving readings. For example, when chatting to someone for the first time they may casually toss in a guess as to that person's star sign, or a relative's name, or a particular hobby. It is no crime to be wrong, and after all the psychic can always say she spoke before she had developed a proper rapport. On the other hand, if the Lucky Guess happens to be right, then such casual displays of effortless accuracy are the stuff of legend.

On one occasion I was talking to a TV researcher on the phone. I made some mild joke about her being "highly efficient, a typical Sagittarius". As it happened, her star sign *was* Sagittarius and she was highly impressed. Throughout my involvement with this particular TV crew, the researcher never tired of recycling this anecdotal evidence of my astounding powers. I have shown salesmen how to use similar approaches to make friends with 'chilly' receptionists who may be unhelpfully good at blocking access to strong prospects. The Lucky Guess cannot hurt, and may often help.

For completeness, I ought to add that the magic fraternity has developed several ways to guess (or appear to guess) a stranger's star sign with perfect accuracy and without using the Lucky Guess. However, such techniques fall outside the realm of cold reading.

4. The Stat Fact

Stat Facts are statements based on statistics and demographic data. There is a wealth of such information available, from libraries, specialist publications, commercial databases and the internet. Some of the more headline-friendly data even makes it to the national press and becomes popular knowledge (or popular misconception).

This kind of information can play its part in the cold reading process. For example, imagine that the psychic is giving readings in a region where, statistically, most of the women who have part-time jobs work either in the health services or the textile industry. If the psychic has reason to think her client is in part-time work, then she knows which two areas are most likely to be worth exploring. As with many aspects of cold reading, there are good and bad ways of using this information.

Here is an example of the bad way:

> "There is an indication that your career is related to health. Or possibly textiles."

This is as transparent as it is trite and useless. In contrast, imagine the psychic is giving an astrological reading, and weaves her spell like this:

> "...turning to the area of work and of career, the influence of Aries suggests that you have a great capacity for working with people and helping them. In fact the conjunctions of your fifth house suggest you could be very successful if you were working with people who needed care or counselling, in one form or another. The stars suggest that this could be right for you..."

At this point, the psychic pauses to see if the client seems to be agreeing. If not, the psychic changes tack:

> "...but that's more to do with your potential, rather than your actual current situation. The relatively rare influence of Saturn at the moment, coupled with your Capricorn nature, suggests you may have found your energy channelled into working with your hands, maybe in a form of manufacturing although, if my interpretation is correct, yours is work which other people will transform. Does this make sense to you?"

In this way, the psychic can hit on two likely careers - health and textiles- in a way which at least sounds like the information is coming from the stars rather than a web page of local census statistics.

Obviously, the success of this element depends on how reliable the information is, and how intelligently it is applied. Experienced cold readers make it their business to gather information which is likely to prove useful. Mediums and spiritualists, for example, have everything to gain from learning the statistically commonest causes of death, and to flavour their Stat Statements accordingly.

There is certainly no shortage of demographic data available. There are tables and reports pertaining to educational attainment, careers, salary levels, marrying age, prevailing health problems and myriad other subjects.

To rely on very well-known statistics is to invite unimpressed and rather cynical responses. But less well-known statistics can be extremely useful, as can attention to fine distinctions. For example, what is the most popular sport or pastime in Britain? Most British people would say football, which is true in terms of the numbers who have an interest *as spectators.* But in terms of those who *actively take part,* the top sport by a long margin is angling or fishing. Similarly, few of my fellow Brits would guess that *doing jig-saw puzzles* is something like the fifth most popular recreational pursuit in the country.

5. The Trivia Stat

This element consists of a statement about trivial domestic and personal details. Whereas the Stat Fact is derived from official statistics, Trivia Stats are based on widely-applicable facts gleaned from experience rather than bureaucratic compilations. Experienced cold readers develop their own favourite Trivia Stats over time. Here are a few I have collected over the years. Some of them strike me as more likely to be hits than others. See what you think!

Regarding what you would find in most people's homes:

- a box of old photographs somewhere, not neatly sorted into albums
- some old medicine or medical supplies years out of date
- at least one toy, or some books, which are mementoes from childhood
- some item of jewellery, or maybe war medals, from a deceased family member
- a pack of cards, even if they say they never play cards, and very often one or more cards missing

- some electronic gizmo or gadget which no longer works, will never be repaired, but has not been thrown out
- a notepad or message board which once had a matching pen but the pen is now missing
- a note, attached to the fridge or near the phone, which is significantly out of date
- a few books concerning an interest or hobby which is no longer pursued
- a calendar which is nothing to do with the current year
- consecutive issues of a magazine once subscribed to, but no longer
- a drawer which does not slide as easily as it should, or a cabinet on which the doors do not work properly
- some item on open display which was bought on holiday
- a key which is now redundant, or the exact purpose of which has been forgotten
- a broken watch or clock

Regarding men and women:

- most men tried learning a musical instrument as a child, but then gave up
- most men wore a moustache or beard at some point, even if they have been clean-shaven for years
- most men have at least one old suit hanging in their wardrobe which they can no longer fit into
- most women own, or have owned, an item of clothing which they bought and then never wore
- most women have many more pairs of shoes than they actually need in practical terms
- most women keep photos of their loved ones in their purse or otherwise near them, even if they do not seem the sentimental type
- most women wear their hair long as a child, then adopt a shorter haircut when they get older

- most women have at least one ear-ring the partner of which has been lost
- most people have, or have had, a scar on the left knee
- most people have a number '2' in their house number, or know someone who does
- most people will have been involved in some sort of childhood accident which involved water
- most people with fair skin have experienced bad sunburn at least once

It will be obvious that worthwhile Trivia Stats vary according to culture, region and content. The psychic who wants to use this element has to acquire examples appropriate for her region and clientele. The same is true for many other cold reading elements.

Theme and variations

Trivia Stat elements can be woven into almost any kind of psychic reading. With just a little presentational embellishment, they can be made to sound quite impressive. For example, it is no good simply announcing:

"You have a box of old photographs at home."

This lacks presentational flair, even if it happens to be correct. So the psychic adds a few grace notes, in keeping with the particular form of reading in offer. The tarot version might go something like this:

"Ah... the 3 of Pentacles and, in the same line, The World. A very interesting combination of cards, actually. In general, The World pertains to your own personal domain or presence, like your own home or your own room. This combination suggests the sort of person who makes clear distinctions between things that are important, and things that aren't. You're quite analytical in that respect. It's as if you're inclined to attach far more importance to some possessions than others. You know, you might be the sort who has some photographs, the important ones, neatly compiled into albums, and others which you just sling into an old box, any old how, and never look at."

On the other hand, here is an example of how the palmistry version might go:

"This line, here at the base of the ring finger, indicates your materialistic nature. It's clearly bisected by the heart line, indicating a person who makes clear distinctions - you treasure some possessions like gold dust, while you're happy to

discard or ignore others as if they don't matter. You know the sort of thing I mean - like those people who have loads of family photos, and some are neatly pasted into albums kept in the living room - the important ones - while others get slung in a box, any old how, in a cupboard in the bedroom."

Just to labour the point, here is how the spiritualist might use exactly the same element:

"And I have your Uncle here now. He's very well, he tells me, and loves you very much. Oh, mind you, but he's got quite a sense of humour, and he's complaining now. What's that....? Ah, I understand, he's saying something about photos. Old photographs. He says you have some old photos of him and you don't have them on display anywhere! They're all just in a box in a cupboard, and you never look at them."

Personally, I have used the Trivia Stat very little. Other cold readers seem to set great store by their collection of such statements. As with so many other aspects of cold reading, it is purely a matter of personal style, preference and experience.

6. The Cultural Trend

This is closely allied to the two preceding elements - the Stat Fact and the Trivia Stat. It is simply based on observing prevailing social and cultural trends, and extrapolating from them. A good knowledge of *current* trends can help the psychic to make accurate statements about the subject's life *now* - her character, attitudes, pastimes and pre-occupations. Educated guesses about how these trends will develop can help the psychic formulate predictions for the subject's near future (in addition to all of the 'prediction' elements discussed later).

After I published the first edition of this book, I received feedback from a great many people. One in particular, whom I met after a lecture in Los Angeles, is blessed with very sharp insight and a good sense of fun. For various reasons, he wishes only to be known - in true Watergate style - as Shallow Larynx. On the subject of Cultural Trends, Shallow Larynx sent me this dispatch. I thought I would share it with my readers in more or less un-retouched form.

Shallow Larynx on Cultural Trends:

I can tell you a few trends I have noticed. Wealthy men are picking up the appearance paranoia once reserved for their sisters. Men's skin care products are a $35 million industry and growing. They include moisturisers, under-eye cream

and exfoliant (but done in a manly way).

It is not uncommon for professional men to get manicures. I know of one premier 5-star spa located in California. They hold "Men's Week" four or five times a year. A week at this spa rarely costs less than $5000. Men's Weeks are *always* sold out well in advance. They have some repeat customers who have been more than 50 times.

Men are really catching up on plastic surgery too. I spoke to a woman who runs a boutique hotel in Beverly Hills. The exact address is a secret known only to its very exclusive clientele. This boutique opened its doors in 1988. The proprietor tells me she has seen bookings among male patients jump from 6 percent to 25 percent in the last few years.

Of course, the big imperative for men is exactly the same as that for women. If I remember right, the most popular male procedure is a facelift, with liposuction not far behind. Men tend to go for it round 40 or so, and the motive is defending one's perceived market value. Guys who look haggard and old lose an edge over the younger beta males moving in on the office turf.

All worth knowing, if you are cold reader and your subject is a man who sports a manicure, looks suspiciously healthy, and seems younger than his years.

Another recent and noticeable trend in America has been called the "philanthropy boom". It is not cool to be a miser, and just donning a tuxedo or writing a cheque is not good enough any more. There is very strong social pressure for stupidly wealthy people to start foundations, create innovative programs and otherwise acquire a taste for philanthropy. It starts with the people at the very top of the wealth tree, such as Bill Gates, but then it filters down and becomes a fashionable trend.

So giving is trendy, more so now than ever. I think it would be relatively safe for a cold reader to attribute some kind of philanthropic activity to the subject. Even if the subject rejects this, you can always adopt a knowing tone and attribute the denial to admirable modesty, "Of course, I understand. I would not expect you to believe in promoting your good deeds to others".

Houses are getting bigger. I remember reading somewhere

that the average luxury house has doubled in square footage size. This made me think of real estate data, which can be a goldmine of information. There are websites where you can enter any zip code and get detailed information on a community.

On the same lines, there is a web site for 'Who's Who in Luxury Real Estate'. This is a members-only association of luxury real estate brokers who have to earn their way in. It is international. They have a broker search engine on their site, and many of the brokers have web pages, which might prove useful.

Returning to the subject of housing, it is becoming commoner to buy a plot of land, tear the existing, perfectly good house down, and build a new one. This is called a "teardown", unsurprisingly. This would of course be more likely to occur in a chock-a-block congested place, such as Beverly Hills, rather than Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

The internet has changed the way people live in another serious way. Now, you can work from home much more easily. This means that what would have been a resort home or vacation home is now home, period. Resort communities, like Aspen and Palm Beach, are becoming year-round places to live. And what about the trends in luxury homes? These days it is almost a given that the following rooms are part of the house: his and hers bathrooms, home office, home gym, home theatre or "entertainment centre".

Kitchens have changed. They used to be purely a service area at the back of the house. In old mansions, the kitchen is tucked out of the way, and the servants' quarters are usually nearby. Now, the kitchen has become a sort of showpiece, placed up the front of the house and suitable for hosting guests. It may have a 6000 dollar pizza oven, working beer taps, you name it. It is somewhat analogous to what I call the "SUV effect". You sure as hell do not *need* it, but you certainly *want* it, and it is 'chic' to have it.

(Editorial note for the uninitiated: an "SUV" is a Sport Utility Vehicle. This is a large and very bulky block of car-shaped metal featuring a high wheel-base, such that you may need a small stepladder to get in or out. They come equipped with a vast array of design features and accessories well-suited to shooting big game or embarking

on a personal quest to discover the source of the Nile. Over the past decade, these have proved staggeringly popular with people whose most exotic intention is to drive down to the beauty parlour or pick kids up from school - I.R.)

Cooking used to be a chore. Now, it is a status symbol. Showing off your $125 balsamic vinegars, imported Scottish game hens, gourmet cooking classes and huge trophy kitchen is just another way of advertising how wealthy you are. The up-market kitchen supplies industry has really taken off in recent years. This ties in with eating well, staying healthy and watching one's weight.

Speaking of SUVs, they are far more popular than sports cars. People who buy them routinely take them in to have extra features added. These include hi-tech GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) systems, very powerful hi-fi, a fax machine, printer, Internet connection, TV, video game system, multiple wireless phones and so on. Of course, status symbol sports cars are still with us. But there are many high-flying business executives these days who want their rental car to be an SUV.

Aside from sports cars, there is a huge market for cars that look distinctive, and are conspicuously dissimilar to everyone else's vehicle. The two-car garage is no longer enough. Four- and even six-car garages are no longer all that remarkable.

It is very, very common for teenage girls to shoplift something before they reach womanhood. Some make it into a competitive sport. Frustrated teenage boys who act out criminally tend to choose violence. Frustrated teenage girls steal stuff - usually items which are small but expensive. There is a store in my local mall which is clearly aimed at the 12-18 crowd. It has a big poster on the wall showing a girl in a white angel costume. She is shrugging her shoulders. Her gown has a big ugly green stain on it. The poster says, "Don't Stain Your Perfect Reputation. We Prosecute Shoplifters."

End of report from Shallow Larynx.

My sincere thanks to Shallow Larynx for this rich seam of observations. There is little for me to add. The Psychic who wishes to capitalise upon this kind of element strives to match this kind of awareness, noticing not only the trends themselves but

their roots, causes and implications.

The Childhood Memory

As its name implies, this element consists of a character statement based on common experiences of childhood. The trick is to devise statements that are only slightly less than obvious, or at least seem to be so in the context of a reading. One of my personal favourites is 'the abandoned interest', and it goes like this:

> "In your younger years I get the impression of a particular interest or subject you were very keen on, where you showed lots of promise. I get a feeling that this was something on the creative or artistic side, where perhaps your parents felt you might even have gone on to great things, as they say, but it was not to be."

This kind of comment will win agreement from most clients. The simple fact is that most children pursue their strongest aptitudes with great enthusiasm. However, they generally fail to develop their personal passions into fame and fortune, and so these interests become neglected or abandoned.

The interest generally falls into one of two categories: either creative/artistic (writing, painting, music, dancing) or sports/ athletics. When I use this element, I make a guess as to which of the two I think is more likely, and if it does not seem to hit I try offering the alternative.

Words and significance

In case the Childhood Memory seems too simple to be effective, let me mention another aspect of cold reading psychology. In the course of a successful reading, the psychic may provide most of the *words,* but it is the client that provides most of the *meaning* and *all* of the significance. Clients tend to graft their own specific experiences on to the more generalised words and themes provided by the psychic. We will return to this point later when we look at Presentational Points.

This is an important psychological factor in cold reading. It applies to the majority of elements listed in this section, but it is especially relevant to the Childhood Memory. The psychic's simple reference to "a talent or ability" can evoke a highly detailed and vivid set of memories in the client's mind, full of very specific recollections and feelings - striving to master the piano, producing a first oil painting, winning an athletics prize... or

whatever it may happen to be. Subsequently, the psychic gets the credit not for the simple Childhood Memory statement in its raw form, but for having 'perceived' all these specific and heartfelt memories of years gone by.

The anxious parents

Another Childhood Memory which I have used with great success is 'the anxious parents', which goes like this:

> "Again, looking at your younger, formative years, while all children have a few minor illnesses I can sense something more significant here - it may have been an illness, it could have been an injury or an accident, but it was actually quite serious. I seem to sense your parents and other people around you were more worried at the time than they really had need to be, given that things turned out okay."

This is only one step removed from the obvious (all children go through some illness and disease) to something slightly less obvious (most children experience at least one serious illness or accidental injury). Appearing to 'see' the scene, and to respond to the emotions at the time, lends the statement a nice psychic flavour. A very similar variant is the 'accident involving water'. Most people can find something in their childhood which ties in with a statement along these lines.

The lucky job

Another Childhood Memory statement which I have used actually refers to early *career* steps rather than childhood. I call it the 'lucky job' statement, and it sounds like this:

> "Moving on in time, I'm looking now to around when you got your first proper job or made your first real career move, and... mmm, this is difficult to explain. I get a sense that there was something lucky or fortunate about it, maybe a strong coincidence or a fluke in your favour. Anyway... something not quite orthodox about how you came to get this job or this position. I think perhaps this makes sense to you."

This is just another example of the same Childhood Memory formula: a very common growing-up experience described in a slightly less than obvious way. Employers generally look for experience, and young people cannot gain experience until someone gives them a job. Nine times out of ten, this vicious circle only gets broken because of some piece of good luck or a surprising opportunity. There is nothing especially remarkable about this, but it falls into the category of 'slightly less than

obvious', especially in the context of a psychic reading.

I have relied on Childhood Memories a lot in my media demonstrations, and find them tremendously effective.

8. Folk Wisdom

Psychics are no enemies of tired cliche. Many readings are littered with that combination of an appeal to common experience and boundless optimism which passes for folk-wisdom. Here are half a dozen examples:

> "After this past year, it's not surprising you need a break. Let's face it, we all need a little breathing space now and again to re-charge our batteries."
>
> "While success is assured, you may need to be patient. Never forget that the longest journey starts with a single step / Rome wasn't built in a day."
>
> "We all need to talk things over with a friend from time to time, and it's as true now as it ever was - two heads really are better than one."
>
> "This challenge might look a little daunting, but then again it's surprising what you can do when you put your mind to it, isn't it?"
>
> "The main thing is not to worry. Let's be honest, these things often have a way of coming right in the end, and then you look back and you think well, what was all the worry about?"
>
> "There's quite definitely light at the end of the tunnel. As the old saying has it, the sky is always darkest just before the dawn."

This is not a particularly useful or productive element, but it is an element nonetheless, and can be useful for padding out a reading, or bringing one section to a neat coda before moving on to something else.

This element ties in with a Presentational Point called 'Keeping it folksy' which we will come to later.

9. The Seasonal Touch

The Seasonal Touch is a very simple element. The psychic merely offers statements based on the time of year or other seasonal factors. These obviously vary according to the country, culture and society in which the psychic is giving the reading.

For example, I live in England where the Spring months are typically associated with 'Spring cleaning' and embarking on major new DIY tasks around the home. January and July are the commonest months for major sales in the shops, which many women will flock to in search of bargains.

The financial calendar can also prove useful. One of my correspondents in the United States tells me that between the months of January and April, people will have federal income taxes on the brain. Here in the UK, the January deadline for Income Tax returns proves a regular headache for many people - especially anyone who is self-employed.

To get the most out of this element, give some thought to how many different 'calendars' we all live by, all the time. I have already referred to three, which we might call the household calendar, the retail calendar and the financial calendar. There are many others - the sports calendar, the entertainment industry calendar (seasons for hot new shows, or dreary old repeats), the food calendar and so on.

Adding imagery

There is a risk of this being one of the most transparent elements. Not many British housewives are going to be amazed to learn that they have been doing some Spring cleaning. This glaring lack of subtlety would encourage many psychics to simply ditch it, were it not so delightfully dependable. The artful psychic therefore takes the trouble to dress the statement up with appropriate imagery. For instance, this is not so good:

> "You have been doing some major cleaning chores around the home".

This is better:

> "If I focus for a moment on the domestic aspect of life, I'm getting impressions of activity and quite a lot of effort, I sense some strain - I mean that in both the physical sense, a few aches down your back perhaps - and also in the mental sense, of trying to make things right, to sort out clutter and impose some sense of order, of tidiness, of the right things in the right places. I'm getting a sense of a very energetic aura, but also of fatigue, like someone sorting out cupboards and slinging out old paint tins that haven't been touched for years, that kind of thing."

Extrapolation and perspective

It is possible to extrapolate from basic seasonal data in order to find slightly less obvious things to say. If many women are going to sales in July, then many women are going to face rather frightening credit card bills about a month later, and may go on something of an economy drive the month after that. Hence the psychic giving a reading in September, provided the client seems likely to fit this pattern, can discuss domestic financial affairs with some confidence. Experienced psychics are good at this kind of reasoning, wherein the chain of cause-and-effect leads from 'things everyone knows' to things which might sound like insight, at least by the relatively lax standards of the psychic industry.

Different views

Another way to squeeze more juice out of the Seasonal Touch is to consider different points of view. Taking the 'July = Sales' notion once more, consider four different people: (a) the keen bargain-hunter, who relishes the sales, (b) the shop assistant, who dreads the extra workload and general upheaval, (c) the husband, who is rather shocked at the consequent drain on the marital credit card, (d) someone who has no interest in the sales, and rather resents the disruption in their favourite shops and stores. Four different people, with four very different perspectives. Hence one rather simple piece of information can provide very different material for readings, depending on whether the client belongs to category (a), (b), (c), (d) or 'none of the above'.

Psychics can also dream up Seasonal Touch statements which are more likely to apply to men rather than women. Sporting fixtures provide one obvious source of material. Here in England, quite a few men would regard the start or climax of various sports seasons as their principal reason for living. Some find it easier to recite a string of soccer statistics than to name their wife's birthday or - in extreme cases - their wife. The psychic will generally find these enthusiasts easy to recognise. For example, it is not hard to identify English soccer enthusiasts. The prominent eyebrow ridge, trailing knuckles and ongoing quest for the secret of fire generally provide tell-tale clues. Indeed, many are recognisable from news footage gathered at various European football stadiums, or nearby town centres.

My thanks to Ben Whiting and others for help with this element.

10. **The Opposites** Game

The Opposites Game is a very intriguing element, and one which fascinated me when I first came across it.

The psychic first suggests to the client that there is someone in her life whom she does not get along with, or with whom she feels some friction. The psychic then proceeds to describe this 'awkward' or 'unhelpful' person in some detail.

To do this, the psychic simply endeavours to describe someone who would be the exact *opposite* of the client herself! For example, if the client seems quite reserved and formal, the psychic describes someone who seems carefree, casual and outlandish. If the client seems rather authoritative and outspoken, the psychic describes someone timid and sheepish. In this way, the psychic need only take a minute or two to deliver what seems like quite an impressive 'psychic profile' of this shadowy enemy figure.

More often than not, the client will be able to identify *someone* who matches the description, and whom she dislikes to *some* extent. This element is clearly less than sure-fire, and it is one which I have very little experience of using. Nonetheless, it is mentioned by more than one source on cold reading, and is probably successful often enough to be worth trying.

11. **The Push Statement**

I have deliberately saved the Push Statement until last in this section. This is because it is without doubt the hardest element to explain clearly. It is also one of the most powerful.

The elements I have listed so far are designed to obtain a hit, i.e. agreement from the client that the psychic's pronouncements are accurate, or at least plausible. Push Statements are quite different. They are intentionally designed to be *rejected* by the client. That is, to be rejected *at first.* However, they can almost always be made to fit if the psychic pushes with sufficient confidence and, at the same time, subtly expands the scope for agreement.

Push statements are hard to make up, and generally evolve with experience over many readings. I only have one or two that I trust, and I use them sparingly. One that I have used quite **a** lot is 'the red floor'. It goes something like this:

> "About three months ago, I see you standing in a room, and it seems a strange detail to mention, but for whatever reason I have to mention that I see a red or red-ish floor. I don't think

it's your home or where you work - it's somewhere else. And there's this red colour around you, and this is a place of some significance to you. Now I can only tell you what I'm getting, whether or not it seems to make sense, and what I'm getting is that you are there for a meeting of some kind. I don't know if there's one other person involved or a group, but I sense that someone's expecting you to be there, and you're having to wait for them."

This almost always gets a negative response from the client - which is the intention. I then begin to push the statement, and appear highly confident that eventually the meaning will become clear. This sense of confidence is important, and helps to place the onus on the client to find something that matches. As I continue to push my initial statement, I start to subtly include more options. The colour might have been a kind of rusty brown, or an autumnal shade. It might not have been actually the floor that was significant, so much as the general environment which employed a red-ish colour scheme, or a danger zone (red = danger). The meeting could have been intentional or accidental, significant or trivial, routine or a one-off. It could have been social, professional, family or romantic.

Sooner or later, in a very high percentage of cases, the client will remember *something* that fits. The whole point of a Push Statement is that the psychic seems to be aware of something *which the client herself had forgotten about.* This is devastatingly impressive when it works. It is one thing for a psychic to detect things the client is aware of. It is quite another for the psychic to apparently 'see' things the client herself had more or less forgotten.

It is not easy to devise new Push Statements that are likely to work. The details have to be just sufficiently unusual to lie beyond guesswork, but just sufficiently common to stand a chance of being right. The details must also be capable of being expanded and re-interpreted in progressively broader terms, so that the chances of success are improved as the psychic 'helps' the client to remember.

The shoe and the party

Another example is 'the shoe and the party', which I have used more than once on female clients aged under 35. It goes like this:

"I'm getting the impression of a party or a celebration that I think took place around the festive season, Christmas and all that, but not necessarily an actual Christmas party. There's a

car involved, and a problem with this car or with transportation. And I can see you holding a shoe, or having problems with one of your shoes. It could be something like a broken heel, which is quite common, but I sense something not quite as common as that, such as a strap that has broken or caught in something, or something has damaged this shoe and you're obviously not pleased. And I can sense that you are making your feelings about this very clear to the people around you! Is this making sense?"

Naturally, this element sometimes leads nowhere, and in the face of persistent rejection an escape tunnel is needed. The simplest options are to suggest that if it has not happened yet then it is going to soon, or to ask the client to carry on trying to think back, because the meaning may come to her later. Other ways of escaping from misses are covered later in 'The Win-Win Game'.

A successful push

I was once demonstrating cold reading in a TV production meeting. In the course of a reading for one of the production assistants, I used 'the shoe and the party' and added the name 'Charles'. She was unable to find any match.

Ten minutes after I had *ended* the reading, and while I was in conversation with someone else, the girl suddenly became very excited. In tones of sheer disbelief, she exclaimed that she had just remembered a party from her teenage years during which she had indeed broken her shoe while dancing with one of her friends who was called... 'Charlie'! Although this was by no means a complete success, the girl simply could not believe that I had managed to 'perceive' this long-distant event so accurately.

I have had my successes and failures with Push Statements, but on balance I believe they are worthwhile.

Progress Review

This concludes the second group of elements, which concerned facts and events. The first two groups we have looked at involve giving the client information, or at least appearing to do so. However, a large part of cold reading is concerned with *extracting* information, rather than supplying it. This is the theme of the next group of elements.

Elements about extracting information

The following elements are all concerned with obtaining information from the client, and then putting it to good use. In essence, they involve obtaining information by the simple expedient of asking for it. This sounds very blatant, but the psychic can disguise this process extremely well *if she has to.* So well, in fact, that the client may feel she never provided the psychic with any information at all.

1. The Direct Question

I will begin with the simplest and most transparent approach. In the case of the Direct Question, the psychic simply asks for the information she wants, like this:

"Tell me, what is it that's on your mind?"

or like this:

"Most of the people who come to see me have something that has been weighing heavily on their heart, perhaps an area of life where they are looking for some answers and some light at the end of the tunnel. What would this be in your case?"

This may seem far too facile to play any part in cold reading process, but this is not necessarily the case. It all depends on the nature of the reading and the client's attitude. Many of those who pay for psychic readings are pre-committed. They trust the psychic and the belief system, and neither seek nor require any "proof" of the psychic's gifts. As far as they are concerned, they want help, the psychic is there to give it, and the sooner they can get down to details the better.

If a psychic knows she is dealing with this kind of client, she may use opening lines which readily acknowledge this situation. A seductive reference to the notion of 'value for money' can also help. It might go something like this:

"How we get started, and how we use this session, is entirely up to you. After all, it's your time and your money isn't it? If you prefer, I could take my time while I try to 'tune-in' to the kind of areas you want me to talk about, and the specific problem you'd like me to help you with. I'm happy to do it this way - and my intuition doesn't often let me down - but on occasion it can take me a while. I mean, it could be so many things couldn't it? The other way is that you just tell me what's on your mind and then we can get off to a flying start. I'm here to listen, and I do want to help you."

Delivered to a suitably uncritical and pre-committed client, this kind of pitch will coax forth all the information the psychic could possibly use. In extreme cases, the psychic's toughest problem may be to stem the outpouring of personal information long enough to get the reading started.

Direct Questions are most often used at the start of the reading, to establish the particular focus the client is looking for. However, if the client is sufficiently uncritical and receptive to this kind of blatant inquisition, then the psychic is free to use Direct Questions throughout the reading:

> "Tell me, are you currently in a long-term relationship, or not?"
>
> "Are you satisfied in terms of your career, or is there a problem?"
>
> "What is it about your health that concerns you?"
>
> "Who is the person that has passed over that you want to try and contact today?"

So much for the artless Direct Question, and readings which rely upon it. Most of the time, clients are a little more discerning and psychics a little more subtle in the methods by which they extract information.

2. The Incidental Question

Incidental questions take the form of chatty conversational phrases tacked on to the end of longer sections of patter. They make the request for information sound almost incidental to the main flow of the reading.

There are two types of Incidental questions. The first type are simply designed to prompt for feedback. Here is a representative selection:

"...now why would that be?"
"...is this making sense to you?"
"...can you relate to this?"
"...does this sound right?"
"...would you say this is along the right lines for you?"
"...this is significant to you, isn't it?"
"...you can connect with this can't you?"

The second type cover all the standard 'checklist' questions taught to trainee reporters and journalists: who, what, where, when, how, why. Suppose that the psychic has claimed to perceive some 'impression' or 'sign'. She might then add phrases

such as these:

"...so who might this refer to please?"
"...what might this link to in your life?"
"...what period of your life, please, might this relate to?"
"...so tell me, how might this be significant to you?"
"...can you see why this might be the impression I'm getting?"

The psychic's *inflection* and *tone* of voice can make a big difference to the success of this illusion. A very casual, incidental mention of ".. .now who do you think this could be?" can slip by like a ship in the night, provided the delivery is smooth enough. A good cold reader can litter Incidental Questions all over her reading and leave the client convinced no questions were asked.

3. The Veiled Question

The Veiled Question is very common and very effective. It is simply a request for information worded to sound like a statement. The psychic acts as if she is *giving* information, when in fact she is *extracting* it.

Take a simple question like this: "Does your job involve plenty of travel?". Here is how a psychic might re-phrase this to sound like she is giving information, rather than asking for it:

> "Now I'm picking up an impression here, not a clear one, but an impression all the same, that you could be involved with work that involves a lot of travelling. Now, I don't know if this is now or some time in the past, but that's what the cards suggest. Is this making sense to you?"

The psychic can turn almost any question into what sounds like a tentative statement. In this way, she can gather information about all manner of subjects - family, career, interests, problems, health, relationships and so on.

Disguising the illusion further

In the last example, the psychic ended with an Incidental Question, "...is this making sense to you?". Some choose to disguise this element even further by adopting a slightly more confident style, which avoids ever actually asking a specific question. For instance, the final part of the above example could be modified like this:

> "...I don't know if this is now or some time in the past, but that's what the cards suggest, and I feel that this is something you can relate to at this time."

This slight change of wording makes no practical difference, since it is still designed to prompt useful feedback from the client. However, it is more deceptive since the psychic can legitimately claim, in the strict grammatical sense, that she never asked a question. This can be very disarming.

Themes and variations

There are countless themes and variations on the Veiled Question. In the course of an astrological reading, for example, suppose the astrologer wants to ask "Are you facing a large financial purchase, like a car or a house?". Turning this into a Veiled Question, she might say:

> "Now, there's an indication here to do with money, and of possible financial concern. What this seems to be, if my interpretation is correct, is some sort of decision, related to money or finances, that could have consequences for quite some time to come. This is making sense to you, isn't it?"

It is just as easy to pick names and other factual details out of thin air. For example, the clairvoyant might go through a few seconds of inner concentration before saying:

> "The name 'Jane' is coming to me, and although I'm not sure of the link, possibly something professional rather than personal, this is a name which I believe has significance for you".

This sounds like a statement, but it is really just a way of asking, "Do you know anyone with a name that sounds like 'Jane' ?".

Given a sufficiently smooth and plausible delivery, the Veiled Question creates a very strong illusion that the psychic has already divined some crucial information, via her amazing psychic gifts, and is now working with the client to sketch in what are merely the fine details.

The extended Veiled Question

Psychics with a particularly voluble style may embellish their Veiled questions to an exceptional degree, if time allows. They may weave a web of words so comprehensively as to snare the client in the illusion that they are telling, not asking:

> "I sense that relationships are an area that we might usefully explore. I'm getting an impression from the cards that there is a focus on you and at least one other person, rather than on just you alone. This is making sense to you, I feel. There are indications of issues here to which time should be devoted, having to do with either a known relationship which we could

look at, or one which is yet to be. It's quite a definite sensation, of the giving and the taking, the ups and the downs, that relationships may involve, and I sense a connection to you, and to thoughts you have been having for a while. There may be a battle between the head and the heart, and only you can tell if your heart has identified, or is ready to identify, everything that I'm beginning to sense here. How might this link with you?"

And there you have it. It sounds like a statement, a giving of information. In fact, the psychic has stated nothing and committed herself to nothing. She is simply asking "Are relationships on your mind?".

Flat tone and rising tone

As a final note on the Veiled Question, note that minor adjustments to intonation and timing can greatly help to disguise the fact that a question is being asked. Take an example like this:

"There's an impression here of a link with sport and athletics."

As you can readily demonstrate for yourself, this can be said as either a statement or a question. If you use a relatively flat and even tone, it is a statement. If you use a rising tone towards the end, it becomes a question.

4. The Diverted Question

The Diverted Question is a very subtle and effective technique. The psychic takes a piece of information, one which has already arisen in the course of the reading, and finds ways to feed it back to the client in a modified form.

To see how this works, let us consider our default example of a one-on-one tarot reading. Suppose that during an early part of the reading, an exchange takes place which involves a Direct Question:

"Now, just to help me interpret this correctly, do you work in teaching or a similar field?"

"No I don't."

"Okay, that's fine, in fact what is it you actually do for a living?"

"I run my own design service."

The question was asked and answered, so the psychic now has a piece of solid information. She continues with the reading, making *no reference at all* to this crumb of factual data. As she

does so, at the back of her mind she makes some educated guesses based on this information, and considers how to weave these guesses into the reading.

Since the client is involved in design, she is probably creative and artistic. Since she has taken on the challenge of running her own business, she must be fairly self-confident, and probably in very good heath (people with serious health concerns do not choose to start up their own company). She probably faces plenty of stress, and long hours of work. It is also safe to assume that, like most people running small businesses, she has some clients who cause cash flow problems by not paying her on time.

All of these reasonable guesses can be fed into a later part of the reading which is about health, like this:

> "Turning to health matters, the cards indicate that you have generally had very little cause for concern. You have a good temperament, and may also find creative or artistic outlets for stress and tension, which you find very therapeutic. This is making sense to you isn't it? There are indications here of recurring anxiety, and the presence of the Ten of Coins suggests that this may be related to finance.
>
> This is quite interesting, since this card - the Falling Tower - always guides us to reverse the normal way of looking at things. Hence, while for the majority of people the problem with money is that they just don't have enough, your particular anxiety may be slightly different. It's as if the cards are saying there is money coming towards you, but it often remains tantalisingly out of your grasp for some reason."

Hence a simple fact about the client's career provides the basis for an extended sequence about health. The bonus here is that the psychic can honestly claim never to have asked a single question about health since the reading began!

The Diverted Question requires the psychic to *extrapolate* from a piece of information, and try to reach some plausible conclusions. These conclusions can pertain to the same subject area (in this example 'career') or to a completely different one (in this example 'health'). The latter approach is more deceptive.

The 'sporty' client

To take another example, suppose that during an early part of the reading the psychic asks a Direct Question about leisure interests. Imagine the client says she likes sports and games. The psychic extrapolates from this information, and makes some educated

guesses based on it.

Since the client is the 'sporty' type, she probably takes health issues quite seriously. She is probably disinclined to smoke, drink too much, or eat junk food. Her social life is unlikely to involve many people who have these vices, or the places they go to. She is probably attracted to, or involved with, partners who also keep themselves in reasonably good shape - or, if they do not, she may well have made some attempts to encourage them to do so! Keeping fit also takes a lot of time and commitment. Hence it is fair to assume the client has good mental discipline, but may miss out on a lot of popular culture and trivia. While the couch potatoes are watching TV, she is down at the gym or enjoying a 5 mile jog. Hence she may well be less familiar with the latest hit TV shows, movies and songs than most people. She probably plans rather active and adventurous vacations for herself. And so on.

When the extrapolation and educated guesswork works well, it can deliver astonishing results. Since it is educated guesswork, it can go wrong and lead to the psychic offering some statements that are incorrect. However, to strike a refrain which will be getting more familiar as you progress through this book, being wrong is not a problem if the psychic knows how to cope. More on this later, in 'The Win-Win Game'.

5. The Jargon Blitz

The Jargon Blitz offers yet another way of prompting the client for information, and I confess it is one of my pet favourites. It consists of an explicit reference to the supposed workings of the psychic system in use, liberally peppered with appropriate jargon, which culminates in a prompt for feedback.

In a tarot reading, the Jargon Blitz would involve references to the meanings of specific cards, and other tarot terminology. It might sound something like this:

> "Interestingly enough, I see we've got the Five of Swords, an important card within the lesser arcana, traditionally associated with challenge and struggle in affairs of the heart. What's intriguing is that in the same conjunction of the spread, we've already had 'The Hermit', originally one of the lower triad cards and now generally regarded as indicating not only solitude, but also the accomplishment of personal goals. It's as if the cards are suggesting your personal goals are, at this time, due to take priority over romance. I don't know if this makes sense to you."

To the best of my knowledge, 'lesser arcana' and 'the spread' (meaning the layout of the cards) are genuine pieces of tarot lore, whereas 'conjunction' and 'triad' are tarot gibberish. However, they *sound* good and authoritative, and that is really what matters.

In cold reading terms, the actual significance each card is deemed to have is irrelevant. A serious book on interpreting tarot cards may tell you that 'The Tower' signifies change in existing relationships. However, the cold reader can attribute whatever significance she wants to any card, whether or not it accords with conventional tarot lore. All that matters is that it sounds convincing, and that it leads up to that all-important prompt for feedback.

In similar vein, if offering an astrological analysis the cold reader only needs a small amount of the appropriate vocabulary - 'trine', 'ascendant', 'fifth house' and so on - in order to make the reading sound plausible.

Some cold readers may choose to actually learn about the systems they are using, in order to at least deploy the jargon accurately. While this knowledge can never hurt the cold reading process, I am far from sure that it ever helps either. In my experience, sound knowledge of the divinatory system being used makes little difference to the effectiveness of the reading.

Whether the jargon is used in an informed way or not, the Jargon Blitz remains a highly useful element in readings. It allows the psychic to vary the way she prompts for information. It re-enforces the belief system in use (as mentioned earlier, in The Set Up). It imposes the authority of the reader, and helps to promote the sense of ritual which, as previously discussed, inhibits awkward responses and promotes the desired co-operation.

6. **The** Vanishing Negative

This is a negative question of ambiguous tone and phrasing. Whether the client agrees or disagrees, it can be counted as a hit. Here is an example:

> "... moving on to career matters, you don't work with children, do you?"
>
> *"No I don't."*
>
> "No, I thought not. That's not really your role..."

Or alternatively:

"... moving on to career matters, you don't work with children, do you?"

"I do actually, part-time."

"Yes, I thought so. There's a strong affinity with children indicated... "

The cute phrasing means that if necessary, the negative part of the question simply vanishes, never to be remembered. In my experience, this element is very effective and works with almost all clients.

Re-affirm, re-assure, expand

The Vanishing Negative can be made even more deceptive by adding three neat embellishments.

The first is for the psychic to enhance the client's own response, and emphasise the 'fact' that they are in complete *agreement.* The second is to offer some *reassuring comment* which disparages the alternative option rejected by the client. The third is to *expand* upon the point, as if the initial question was just incidental preamble.

By way of illustration, look at this:

"At this point, I want to move on and address money and career matters. You don't work for yourself do you?"

"No I don't."

First, establish agreement...

"No, I didn't think so. I got quite a clear impression that you weren't in that category..."

Next, the reassurance and gentle disparagement...

"...I don't think you're cut out to be one of these flashy, egocentric entrepreneurs, with all that stress and the hassle. Most of them never get anywhere anyway!"

Finally, the expansion...

"Anyway, the reason I sensed you work for someone else is that I see a change in the relationship with your employer... "

And the psychic then continues, for all the world as if she *knew* that the client had a regular job. The fact that she actually asked a question to discover this is quietly forgotten. Now, let us see the alternative version:

"At this point, I want to move on and address money and career matters. You don't work for yourself do you?"

"Yes, I do, actually. Have done for a while."

First, the agreement (featuring the instant Vanishing Negative)...

"Yes, I thought so. It's actually quite a clear aspect of your chart..."

Next, the reassurance and gentle disparagement...

"...I don't think you're cut out to be just another nine-to-five wage slave. That could never be truly fulfilling for someone like you. You have too much drive and too many good ideas of your own...."

Finally, the expansion...

"Anyway, the reason I picked up on the fact that you run your own business is that I foresee some very good prospects arising from your natural ability to develop new opportunities... "

And the simple Vanishing Negative scores another hit for the gifted psychic!

7. The Sherlock Strategy

This element consists of extracting information by observing the client for clues. As I mentioned in a previous section ('Popular Misconceptions'), I believe this technique to be far more limited in scope than some sources suggest. Nonetheless, it certainly has a part to play.

As is usually the case with cold reading elements, the way the information is used is often more important than how it is derived. For example, if the client has long, even nails on her right hand and very short nails on her left, the psychic can deduce that she probably plays the guitar. (If the nails are the other way around, she probably plays the guitar and is left-handed as well!)

The bad way to capitalise on this observation is to say:

"The astrological chart indicates that you play the guitar."

The better way is to say something along these lines:

"As a Gemini with the influence of Venus in your third house, you may well be inclined to some form of artistic self-expression. You have almost certainly felt the need to explore forms of communication and expression that go beyond the merely verbal. You have access to sources of inspiration and creativity which are more highly developed in you than in

many people.

Your chart would most clearly suggest an involvement with music or harmony, for which you clearly have great potential. This is an aspect of yourself that you have learned to treasure, and it has been a great source of comfort to you on many occasions."

Cold readers who are fond of the Sherlock Strategy tend to collect their own favoured stock of tell-tale clues. Quite how valuable these clues are is a matter of subjective assessment. What seems too obvious' (hence not worth mentioning) to one cold reader may seem quite delightfully subtle to another. Likewise, what one psychic considers to be a 'sure sign' may seem a 'risky guess' to another.

With these caveats in mind, you may like to consider the nine examples below and see what conclusions you, as a psychic using the Sherlock Strategy, would come to. Please do not spend *too* long dwelling on these examples! I offer them only for fun. There are no 'definitive' answers, and personally I would consider all of them either useless or unreliable. Nonetheless, you will find some possible answers at the back of the book in Appendix note 6.

'Sherlock Strategy' Guessing Game

1. A dark patch, like a faint bruise and roughly oval in shape, on the mid-to-left side of the client's throat about half-way down.

2. Female client. On the outer side of the left hand, in the area between the base of the thumb and the wrist, there appear to be several lines or streaks of faint red skin discolouration.

3. Female client. Several faint traces of a white, chalky powder around her lower leg and ankles, but *not* on her shoes.

4. Calluses on the right thumb, index and middle-finger.

5. Female client with a mole or visible birthmark of some kind on the face or neck.

6. Female client. It is noticed that she has with her a supply of mints and mint-flavoured chewing gum, which she seems to be using in an habitual manner.

7. Faint indications of blue powder, possibly chalk, around fingertips or cuffs.

8. Faint black or dark grey traces, like a smudge or greasy smear, seen on areas of the fingers or thumb, or near the side-pocket

region of coat or jacket.

9. Very mild abrasions or reddish, irritated skin around the inside of the elbows, (end of the Sherlock Strategy Guessing Game)

Said rather than seen

The Sherlock Strategy can be applied to what is said as well as to what is seen. For example, suppose the psychic and the client enjoy a brief chat before the reading begins. The client, while taking off her coat and sitting down, may happen to say:

> "Sorry I'm late, the traffic was dreadful coming back from Woodvale".

'Woodvale' might mean nothing at all to the psychic. Alternatively, it might be an area of town associated with a major hospital, a golf club or a school with a good academic reputation. Perhaps it is known for its terrific gymnasium and health spa, or the Farmer's Market held twice a week, or a woodland area where people take their dogs for a walk. In each case, the psychic may be able to form some tentative guesses about the client's career, interests, family or current concerns.

Sherlock and the Jacket Lining

Earlier in this book I mentioned one of my most valued correspondents, known as Shallow Larynx (he first cropped up back in the section on Cultural Trends). He offers this contribution to the Sherlock Strategy:

> "I think I got this from a book which, among other things, dealt with techniques for women to use when evaluating potential suitors. It seems there was once a 'gold-digger' who had a good technique for assessing her dates. Once the couple were seated at the restaurant \ cafe \ whatever, the man would often drape his *blazer* jacket over the chair. Not fold it up flat and closed, or hang it up properly, but shrug it off onto the chair back so the lining was visible. The woman would examine the lining of the jacket, to see whether it was fresh and pristine or frayed and stained. The condition of the lining was apparently a good predictor of the condition of his bank account - or his willingness to share the benefits of this bank account."

The career from 26 years ago

Notwithstanding my earlier comments about deductive observation, there are certainly times when it pays great dividends. I was once invited by Paramount Television to appear on the Leeza Gibbons TV talk show, which is taped in Los Angeles. The producers wanted me to demonstrate cold reading, so before the show I posed as a clairvoyant.

I sat in a small room off to one side of the main studio. One at a time, four different women from the studio audience (chosen at random by the production team) came in and sat down opposite me. I pretended to sense 'psychic impressions' which I scribbled down on a pad. Apart from initial pleasantries such as 'Hi, how are you', *neither I nor any of the women exchanged a single word.*

Let me tell you about one of these four women in particular. I guessed she was in her mid-fifties. From looking at her dress, her hair and deportment, I felt that her self-presentation was just that little bit better than most women know how to achieve. This suggested a background in fashion, beauty, modelling or some similar line of work.

I also noticed that she was wearing quite a lot of silver and gold jewellery. It was all in excellent taste, and perfectly co-ordinated, but nonetheless just a little ostentatious. This led me to think she might be the sort that enjoys attention, and knows how to 'dress to impress'. This led me to consider that she might have been involved in an area of show business.

Still trying to reach a firm conclusion, I noticed that her seated posture (relaxed yet very upright, with the chin held level and not allowed to dip) suggested someone who knew about good breathing control. I surmised that she knew about meditation, singing, or playing a wind instrument such as the flute. Putting all this together, I concluded that at one time she might have been a singer, or a musician. Since it tends to be the singers who get the limelight, I decided to pursue that option.

What sort of singer? She seemed to lack the build, or the airs and graces, that one might associate with opera and the classics. I also felt she was not quite 'strait-laced' enough for the classical platform - she struck me as being very dynamic, with plenty of energy and a good sense of fun. So, something lighter and more informal. Jazz? If so, her age suggested that her heyday would have coincided with the big band era, and the rise of popular jazz

and 'swing'. I therefore concluded that she had probably been some sort of popular 'light jazz' cabaret or band singer.

I got a chance to talk to this particular woman later on, quite separately from the cold reading demonstration. I mentioned my 'impression' about her former singing career (suitably embellished in my usual cold reading style). It was very gratifying to discover that some 26 years previously she had been a professional cabaret artist and jazz singer!

As you may imagine, she was absolutely astonished that I was able to describe what she had been doing some 26 years ago. In fact, she found this highly persuasive evidence of my 'psychic powers'. Even once the truth had been revealed (as it always is in my TV demonstrations), she suspected that I was genuinely clairvoyant.

8. The Russian Doll

This is another excellent element for obtaining information. The Russian Doll consists of a statement which can have several possible layers of meaning. The psychic offers the initial statement and then, if necessary, explores the other layers of meaning until she gets a hit. I also call these 'Onion Skin' statements. Here is an example:

> "Now I want to just say something to you about your daughter. You do have a daughter don't you?"
>
> *"No, I don't."*
>
> "Well, it could be the person I'm trying to get to here is actually a daughter-in-law, is this making sense?"
>
> *"No, not really."*
>
> "Perhaps a god-daughter?"
>
> *"Well, there's my friend's little girl, I'm god-parent to her..."*
>
> "Oh well, that's obviously the impression I was getting, I knew it was someone who was a daughter, or like a daughter, to you..."

In this hypothetical example, the psychic needed three bites at the cherry before she got the agreement she was looking for. On other occasions, she might get an agreement at the first or second try. This element looks clumsy in print, but I have heard it used in real life without any objection at all from the client. Even if all variations on the theme get rejected there is always a way out (see 'The Win-Win Game' later).

'Music' and 'Collecting'

Another Russian Doll which I have had some success with concerns music:

"There's quite a clear indication here of music in your life."

If the client happens to play an instrument, the psychic wins and the client is impressed at the awesomely accurate psychic intuition. But if not, the psychic modifies this initial statement until agreement is obtained. There are all manner of variants which can be offered: you play a musical instrument / you once started learning to / you would like to / you sing / or used to / or would like to / you go to concerts and clubs / or you do not but you would like to do so more often / or at least you appreciate good live music / you have a music collection that means a lot to you / or you would like to have / or you listen to the radio a lot.

One more very successful Russian Doll concerns collecting. Any suitable phrasing will do, such as:

"I sense that perhaps you're a collector, or why is it I'm seeing a collection of some kind here?"

In my experience if the client is female, and any age *except* in the middle of her wildest teenage years, then the 'collecting' Russian Doll stands a very good chance indeed of yielding a hit. Not only are many women collectors, of everything from china dolls to potato chips 'resembling' famous people, but also the term 'collecting' can be interpreted so many ways. If the client does not have a collecting hobby as such, perhaps she will accept she is a 'collector' of friends, or experiences, or wisdom gleaned from life's ups and downs. In the curious realm of psychic readings, even risible twists of interpretation such as this can be the stuff of much-praised 'accuracy'.

The Mill

I remember I once heard an excellent Russian Doll used by a medium. Supposedly receiving messages from a dear departed loved one, the medium confidently announced that he (the person 'in spirit') had memories of "the mill". In England, where I live, there was a point during the earlier part of the 20th century when the majority of the working population spent their days (or nights!) in a mill of some kind - cotton mill, steel mill, lead mill, flour mill, or whatever. Hence for clients of a certain age and background, this was a superb Russian Doll element which stood every chance of being a hit, providing all the possibilities were

systematically explored.

Making up Russian Dolls is not too hard. The psychic simply has to think of words which lend themselves to different meanings, contexts and interpretations, and to then glide smoothly from one option to another until some significance is accidentally encountered.

Progress Review

This concludes the third group of elements, which concerned extracting information from the client as surreptitiously as possible. Now we can move on to the final group of elements, which concern the client's future.

Elements about the future

Psychics are well-known for their ability to peer into the future on behalf of their clients, and few psychic readings would be complete without at least a little glimpse into tomorrow and beyond. This is a very important aspect of cold reading, and one which is so easy it is laughable (except to believers).

I have already clarified the fact that this book is about cold reading, and not magic tricks. Let me stress this point one more time, since I have often come across confusion on the issue.

Magical predictions

There is an excellent and very stylish magician called John Lenehan. I remember seeing John when he was running a regular, weekly magic show at a theatre in north London. One of these shows took place a few days before the final of the Wimbledon Tennis Championship. John wrote a prediction (sight unseen of the audience) and sealed it inside a padded envelope. He then asked a spectator in the audience to sign the envelope several times (no stooges - it could have been anyone). Next, John took a Polaroid photo of the spectator standing there in the theatre, holding the sealed envelope, and stapled this photo across the flap of the envelope. Finally, John gave the envelope to the spectator to take home and keep safe for one week.

The next show took place one week later, *after* the Wimbledon finals had taken place. The same woman brought along the envelope that had been in her possession all week. It was still covered in her own signatures and it still bore her own photo, just to prove that it was the exact same sealed envelope (which it really was). Invited to join John on stage once more, she herself opened the envelope (with John standing well away) and took out the prediction. It was a 100% accurate prediction of the results of the Wimbledon final!

The above is a factually accurate description of what happened. It may sound incredible, and it is. I doubt John will mind me telling you that it was a trick (those of my readers involved in the dark deceptive arts will recognise the ingenious effect devised by Lee Earle). John is an amazingly accomplished performer, not to mention extremely funny, but even he cannot *really* see into the future and accurately predict sports results!

Handing out the headlines

This is just one example of the startling and ingenious prediction routines featured by many of today's magicians and mind readers. I have even performed a few of them myself over the years. I once *posted* a sealed prediction to Britain's most popular daytime TV show two days before I was due to appear on it (This Morning' with Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan). The envelope was signed on air by the show's presenters, and then kept somewhere safe by the producer. Two days later, when I appeared on the show, presenter Richard Madeley first of all confirmed that the envelope had been locked away, and that I had not been allowed anywhere near it. He himself then opened the envelope live on air, without me even so much as touching it. It contained an exact prediction of that morning's newspaper headlines! Good fun - but again nothing more than a magic trick, the method being well-known to magicians who specialise in this kind of thing.

Some of these effects are so baffling that spectators sometimes conclude they *must* involve at least *some* genuine psychic ability. Without wishing to spoil the fun, let me give you a cast-iron assurance that these are *tricks.* Intriguing, ingenious, entertaining tricks, but tricks nonetheless. They involve no psychic powers whatsoever. How are they done? If your interest is casual, I do not want to spoil the fun by telling you. If your interest is sincere, take up magic as a hobby and eventually you will find out (but it could take a while).

Enough of magic tricks, and back to cold reading. Here are a number of ways in which the skilled cold reader can offer predictions of future events, within the context of a psychic reading.

1. **Peter Pan Predictions**

Peter Pan predictions are ones in which the psychic simply predicts whatever the client wants to hear. This may seem such a simplistic and transparent ruse as not to be worth mentioning. On the other hand, it is such a key aspect of the psychic seduction that it would be incongruous not to include it in this section. Indeed, some sources would say this is the single most important element of all.

Of course, Peter Pan predictions are found in many places besides psychic readings. Every sales message or advertisement promises the same thing: the purchaser's future will be better for having

made the purchase than it would be otherwise. This is untrue at least as often as it is true, but we tend to carry on believing it regardless.

In the context of a psychic reading, Peter Pan predictions are usually reserved for whichever of the Principal Themes the client seems most interested in. Health worries? Not to worry, an eventual return to good health is indicated. Financial problems? They will all be sorted out in the long run. The new romance? Congratulations, it is going to be a spectacular success!

It is as simple as that. Whatever the client most desires to come true, the psychic makes sure she sees it happening. In this day and age, this kind of highly reassuring message is perhaps the only one people cannot readily obtain from the media or anywhere else. Many, it seems, are prepared to pay good money to hear it said in a way that at least *sounds* sincere, reassuring, and credible.

Of course, any statement about the future is perfectly safe from the psychic's point of view. At the time of the reading, the client cannot check the statement one way or the other. Afterwards, the predictions that come true will be remembered and cited as evidence of the psychic's awesome gift. The ones that do not will be forgotten.

2. Pollyanna Pearls

These are fairly bland predictions which follow a set formula. They focus on one area of the client's life, and say that things which may have been difficult lately will improve soon. They are named after Pollyanna, the irrepressibly optimistic heroine of Eleanor Porter's 1913 novel. A typical example might go like this:

> "Financially, it's been a bit of a bumpy ride these past couple of years, but the next 18 month or so will be a lot easier".

Psychics can apply Pollyanna Pearls to most facets of life, and to almost any type of reading. Here are some other examples which illustrate possible themes and variations.

The tarot reader:

> "The spread of the cards indicates that relationships have been a source of concern over the past 14 months, perhaps not in ways that even your close friends would fully understand. However, there are indications here that these concerns are due to fade, and the next 14 to 18 months offer much happier and smoother prospects."

The spiritualist:

> "I have your late grandfather here with me now. He's telling you not to worry so much about the house and about money. He knows you've had your worries in recent times, but he wants to let you know that financially there's a much better spell ahead, and that your plans are going to go well."

The astrologer:

> "There have been elements of conflict in your chart over the past 6 to 18 months, which could have led to some career difficulties. However, Saturn has recently entered your chart, and this influence will lead to some very significant, and beneficial, changes that will see you on a much more fulfilled path before the end of the year."

The Pollyanna Pearl is a highly versatile element, and can hardly go wrong since it is non-verifiable (at the time of the reading). In any case, everyone likes to hear glad tidings. I have used this element often, and never encountered any resistance to its charms.

3. Certain Predictions

These are predictions which simply cannot fail. They are sure-fire, blue-chip, gold-plated predictions that can be offered with confidence. Here are a few simple examples:

> "Someone new is going to come into your life."
>
> "A minor illness or injury is indicated."
>
> "You will experience problems with an investment, or with something you have bought."

Did you spot the trick involved? The psychic conveniently forgot to say *when* these things will happen. Since the psychic has not mentioned any time scale, it is impossible for her to be wrong. All of these things are bound to happen eventually - the client just has to wait around long enough. If they happen quite soon, the psychic takes the credit for her highly accurate 'instant' predictions. If they happen years and years later, the psychic takes the credit for having seen far, far into the future. If they never happen at all before the client passes away, she is by then in no position to ask for a refund.

I once saw an excellent documentary in which psychics were secretly filmed while they gave readings to clients. Some of these readings included predictions about the future. The production team went back to the same psychics six months later, and

showed them that their predictions had not come true. Of course the psychics simply offered the assurance that "they will, in time". The production team patiently waited yet another six months, and then went back to show that the predictions had *still* not come to pass. And of course, they got exactly the same answer.

4. 50/50 Predictions

These are predictions about events which can only go one of two ways. Will the client have a boy or a girl? Will she pass her driving test or fail it? Will she get the job or not? Marry the current guy or not marry him? Will a stock be higher or lower one month hence? Will team X win the championship or not?

Psychics tend to latch on to these questions, and offer confident predictions as to the outcome. With the odds immutably fixed at 50/50, the more predictions the psychic makes, the more hits she is bound to get. If she makes a hundred such predictions in a year, by the end of the year she will have about 50 totally accurate predictions to her credit. As far as the psychic is concerned, the more the merrier. She can make it her business to ensure she retains documentation of *all* her attempts, so that the ones which come good can be supported with proof later. These come in handy for positive PR and sceptic-bashing.

What about the misses? It is unlikely anyone will bother to document the psychic's predictions, and then get the chance to confront her with the ones that fail to come true. In the unlikely event of a psychic being confronted in this way, she has several escape hatches. She may be able to claim she has been mis-quoted, or only selectively quoted. Alternatively, she may say that a particular *report* of her prediction was inaccurate, but the prediction itself was correct. However, the simplest and most disarming defence is just to smile sweetly, admit the error, and point out that it is hardly significant. Something like this will do:

> "Yes, I do get one or two predictions wrong. It's a process of interpretation, and sometimes that interpretation can be very difficult. I have never claimed to be infallible have I? But I know I'm right far more often than not, so it does work".

Or, in slightly more defensive mood:

> "Fine. I'm not asking anyone to believe anything. Yes, I make mistakes. But my clients know the value of the services I provide, and frankly they are the people that matter".

5. Likely Predictions

For these predictions, the psychic makes a guess about the future which stands a reasonable chance of being correct. Unlike the Certain Predictions, listed above, these *do* include a time scale. For example:

> "Within the next month, you will receive an unexpected contact from someone you haven't heard from in quite a while."
>
> "Within the next week or two, you will hear of a legal matter which could directly affect you."

Both these predictions are quite likely to come true, since they are perfectly mundane and happen all the time. Nonetheless, by the strange and self-serving rules of the psychic industry, such predictions are apparently the very stuff of wonder. Here is another:

> "In the year ahead I foresee an accident involving you, or a member of your family, and broken or falling glass."

Again, this stands a fair chance of coming true, since it happens all the time. You should also bear in mind the tremendous latitude which is applied to psychic pronouncements. The "glass" mentioned above could be anything - a wineglass, a window, a mirror, a car headlight, a bottle, a pair of spectacles, a glass table, a fish tank, a skylight... whatever. It could even be something which merely *resembles* glass, such as the ice-covered surface of a pond.

6. Unlikely Predictions

Surprisingly enough, as well as the Likely Predictions mentioned above, the psychic may also find it worthwhile to deliberately make an Unlikely Prediction once in a while. If it fails, there is no harm done. On the other hand, if by some outrageous fluke it happens to come true, it affords ample opportunities for glowing PR, and strengthens the faith of the devoted. It also makes a very useful stick with which to beat sceptics. For all these reasons, the psychic may, just once in a while, offer a forecast which she knows is unlikely to come true:

> "Four weeks from now, you will meet someone with exactly the same initials as yourself."
>
> "You will see an old friend driving a car of silver colours, with a dog in the rear seat."

By their very nature, most Unlikely Predictions will fail. However, the one or two that *are* successful can be put forward as especially persuasive proof of the psychic's powers. After all, the more unlikely the event predicted, the more amazing the prediction is deemed to be.

If the psychic gives just one reading a day, and incorporates just one Unlikely Prediction per reading, she may well get one or two hits by the end of the year. This low number is more than compensated, in terms of PR value, by their content being so self-evidently unlikely and un-guessable. By such means are great reputations founded.

Incidentally, mathematically knowledgeable friends tell me there is something called the 'Poisson Distribution' which gives the expected number of occurrences of rare random events which have a large number of opportunities of happening. Car accidents for example: for most drivers it is very unlikely that they would have an accident on a specific journey, but given that they usually have a large number of journeys accidents tend to happen every now and again. The lottery is another example: millions of attempts, each with a minuscule probability of winning You could calculate the expected number of successful "unlikely predictions" in a year (if you wanted to).

7. Factual Predictions

These are simple, straightforward predictions about the medium-term future. For instance:

> "You will be involved in a holiday, or a long journey, next March."
>
> "In June, you will hear news of an unexpected celebration."
>
> "Before the end of the year, I see you finding a valuable family memento which you thought you had lost for good."

There is little or no artifice involved in such predictions. The psychic simply takes a guess, which may or may not turn out right. Nonetheless, the predictions are likely to work in her favour.

The first reason is that clients remember the predictions that come true and forget the rest. Secondly, only the clients whose predictions came true tend to talk about them. It makes for highly intriguing conversation to tell your friends about a prediction that turned out to be right. Few people ever think it worth mentioning that they went to see a psychic, she made a prediction, and it did not come true.

Another factor in the psychic's favour is that clients are prone to invest readings with the benefit of hindsight. Suppose the psychic merely predicted "a long journey next March". Suppose, too, that the client unexpectedly gets sent on a business trip to Australia, flying out in February but returning just before March. The chances are that she will quote the psychic as having said "You will go on a business trip overseas in the early part of the year, February or March". The psychic's actual words were quite different, and off the mark. But who cares about that?

8. Self-fulfilling Predictions

Another neat trick is for the psychic to make predictions which possess the virtue of being self-fulfilling. These generally pertain to, or are based on, aspects of the client's mood and personality. For example:

> "You will begin to adopt a more positive and friendly outlook. You will let go of many old grievances, and start afresh - being a good friend to yourself, and ready to be a good friend to others. You will soon have a larger social circle than at present."

This kind of prediction is likely to be self-fulfilling in many cases. If the client goes away convinced that she is about to become more popular, she may well feel very happy at the prospect. Since she is happier, she is more cheerful and more sociable. Since she is more sociable, she makes friends more easily. Bingo! Another successful psychic peek through the curtain of time.

There are any number of possible variations: gaining new confidence, making a fresh start, turning over a new leaf, resolving a relationship issue, feeling more settled, becoming less anxious, tackling a problem with renewed determination... and so on. In each case, just believing the psychic's words may be enough for the prediction to be self-fulfilling.

9. Vague Predictions

I have already stated my doubts about the 'vagueness' theory of cold reading (see 'Five popular misconceptions'). However, it is true that for any psychic in the prediction business, vagueness has much to recommend it. Many psychic predictions practically elevate vagueness to an art form. I refer to such typical gems as:

> "A journey is indicated."
>
> "I see a new source of fulfilment in your life."

"Your life will enter a new phase of progress."

"A surprising aspect to the month of June will have significant implications which only become clear much later in the year."

Astrological readings, in particular, lend themselves to this markedly fatuous kind of prediction. This may be because its followers are, by definition, capable of perceiving significance where none exists.

10. Unverifiable Predictions

Another ruse employed by psychics is to make predictions which the client can never verify either way. Here is an example:

"Someone you know will secretly harbour some grudge or ill-will against you. They will plan to put obstacles in your way, but you will overcome their plans without even realising it."

Take a moment to study the careful wording used here. You will see that the client cannot possibly know if it ever comes true or not. Here is another:

"At the place where you work, there will be some behind-the-scenes dealings which do not involve you, but which will be to your advantage in the long term."

The psychic who makes Unverifiable Predictions can never be wrong. And a psychic who is never wrong is a happy psychic.

11. One-way Verifiable Predictions

One-way Verifiable Predictions are perhaps the single neatest form of prediction in cold reading. These predictions *can* be verified, but *only* if they come true. If they do not come true, this failure can *never* be proved. Here is an example:

"A friend will be inclined to telephone you with news that has an effect on your career, but may decide at the last minute not to do so."

Let us look at the possibilities. If some friend or other does call as described, purely by coincidence, then the prediction is a hit. If they do not, this can be attributed to the fact that they decided not to, which the psychic mentioned as a possibility. Here is another example which works in exactly the same way:

"Someone you have had a professional connection with in the past may decide to get in touch with news of an interesting career opportunity. However, they may realise they can't really offer you what you're worth, and decide against it."

As before, the psychic can only be proved right, but can never be proved wrong. To anyone in the psychic trade, One-way Verifiable Predictions are a thing of beauty, and the ability to churn them out more or less at will is a skill worth cultivating.

Special section: Public Predictions

The techniques listed so far pertain chiefly to predictions made in the context of a private reading. However, many psychics like to try their hand at the occasional public pronouncement. It is therefore worth mentioning some of the methods used by psychics to build a reputation for high-profile media-friendly public prophecy. I do not regard these as part of cold reading as such, but they are included here for completeness.

Psychics sometimes get asked about public events, such as the outcome of a sports contest or a political election. The psychic has two choices. She can go with the current betting, or deliberately go against it. If she takes the first option, she stands a high chance of being right, which will delight her fans but impress few others. If she takes the second option, she stands less chance of being right, but will appear all the more impressive if events happen to go her way ('Psychic X beats the tipsters!'). Most psychics prefer to play safe and go with the flow. But either option has its advantages, and neither poses any danger to the psychic's reputation. If she gets a prediction wrong, so what? In most cases, no-one cares, no-one remembers.

In extremely rare cases, some unusually assiduous investigator may take the trouble to document a psychic's incorrect prediction, to get all the facts correct, and to confront the psychic with this failure. If the normal escape routes are sealed off in this way, then the psychic can simply serve up a good-natured homily on human striving and imperfection:

> "Well I never said I'm infallible, and of course you're quite right, I do make mistakes from time to time. We're all on a path of learning, and I'm still learning my craft even after all these years. I can't be right about everything - yes, sometimes I stumble, I fail. But I'm just trying to do the best I can with the gift I've been given, and on the whole I think my track record is pretty good".

Golden disasters

Some psychics get involved in the disaster business, and care to predict earthquakes, airplane crashes, assassinations and similar tragic news. The rule here is for the psychic to predict vague,

predict often, and document everything. Then she can scream from the rooftops if she happens to get one right (which has to happen eventually, persistence being the virtue that it is).

In a rather more sordid vein, some psychics realise that these kinds of disasters may happen infrequently, but they nonetheless obey the laws of probability. There are not many major air disasters, but they must happen every once in a while. The longer it has been since the last major air crash made headlines, the more likely it is that one will occur soon. Psychics may therefore find it useful, if unsavoury, to keep up with the news and try to ascertain which *type* of bad news has *not* happened for a while, and therefore seems overdue. This can form the basis for some predictions which are regrettably accurate, and great for business. If you doubt that this works, try it for yourself over the next six months. *(See Appendix note 7 for more on this subject.)*

Different place, different prediction

Another time-honoured method is to make conflicting predictions in different places. In magazine A, the psychic predicts the red team will win. In magazine B, she predicts the blue team will win. After the event, guess which cutting gets pasted into the scrapbook and added to future press releases? It is very unlikely that anyone is going to dig up the truth about these conflicting guesses. And even if they do, the psychic can always claim she changed her mind, or the 'vibrations' she works from changed after she made the first prediction. There is always an excuse!

Having briefly discussed public predictions, I can now proudly unveil the concluding element of this section. It is without doubt the most effective, most powerful prediction technique I have ever come across: the 'Neverwas'.

12. The Neverwas Prediction

This is not a cold-reading technique as such, and it is only relevant to press interviews and similar public situations. However, it is so stunningly simple and beautiful that I simply had to include it.

Assume that the psychic is going to be interviewed by a journalist. Before the interview, the psychic simply *makes up* a nice story about some amazing prediction she made a while ago, and which came true. The fact that she never really made any such prediction, and that the entire story is simply an invented fabrication designed to sound good in an interview, is irrelevant.

All that matters is that it is a good story with a nice punchy feel to it. If it involves a twist ending, all the better. For example, the story might involve a prediction which came spectacularly true but in a way which no-one (not even the psychic!) could have foreseen.

The interview takes place, and the psychic mentions this anecdotal gem involving an amazing prediction. Let us see what might happen once the interview is over.

The journalist who writes up the interview *may* bother to precede the prediction story with a disclaimer, such as "Psychic X *claims* that five years ago...". This makes it clear that the prediction is merely a claim, not a fact that has been checked and verified. However, this is by no means certain. Not all journalists would regard such a disclaimer as either necessary or desirable. In which case, the prediction story may get written up as if it were documented fact. Once the story is part of the news archives, it can and will be recycled ad nauseam, polishing the psychic's glittering reputation for years to come.

Second scenario. Suppose the conscientious journalist *does* include the disclaimer. The psychic is still in with a chance. Before the interview gets printed, the disclaimer could get left out for any number of reasons, such as an over-worked sub-editor hastily trimming the interview to fit the page. The disclaimer gets 'trimmed' out, and the made-up prediction story once again gets printed as if it were fact.

Third scenario. Suppose the story duly appears in print, with the disclaimer intact. Some time later, another journalist may be preparing a piece about the same psychic. This second journalist checks out the news archives, sees the prediction story and decides it makes 'good copy'. The story gets rehashed in a slightly 'tidied up' form, *without* the dull disclaimer. Yet again the story ends up enshrined as fact in the press archives, and can be trotted out for PR purposes whenever the psychic (or her fans) so desire.

In all these different ways, the Neverwas prediction can become set in stone as a piece of factual news archive. It may go on to appear in magazine articles or books for decades afterwards. A documentary film-maker may even decide to arrange a 'reconstruction' of the whole story, perhaps failing to acknowledge to the viewing millions the distinction between 'reconstruction' and 'construction'.

Far be it from me to suggest whether a Neverwas has ever happened in real life. It is mentioned here only as a possibility.

Progress Review

This concludes the fourth and final group of elements concerning predictions. It also concludes the section concerning the Elements of the reading. Now it is time to see what happens when things go slightly wrong for the psychic.

How it works 4/7: The Win-Win Game

So far we have looked at the Set up, the Principal Themes, and the Elements involved in the cold reading process.

It should be clear that these elements *can* deliver wonderful hits, and are likely to do so in many cases. However, this can never be guaranteed in all cases. There are going to be times when the psychic offers a particular statement which the client firmly rejects.

If this happens, the psychic uses one of the methods below to get out of trouble, fix the damage, and carry on as if nothing had happened. In other words, if the statement is a hit, the psychic wins, and if it is a miss, the psychic wins anyway!

What follows is a list of 11 ways in which psychics deal with negative responses. They are in no particular order, except that number 1 is always the best, and number 11 is always the last resort.

1. Persist, wonder and let it linger

This is the commonest method of all, and a very reliable one. It is capable of dealing with more or less any negative response.

It involves three phases:

(a) The psychic persists with the offered statement and tries to encourage at least partial agreement

(b) she acts puzzled, and invites the client to share the blame for the 'discrepancy'

(c) she leaves the discrepancy unresolved, in case the client finds a match later on

Let me take you through a typical example. It might start like this:

> "And I'm getting the name Sarah, now why's that significant to you?"
>
> *"Mmm... I can't think. No. No-one I know."*

A negative response! First of all, the psychic persists with the original statement. Given a bit more time and encouragement, the client might well come up with a link she did not think of before. When this happens, it looks like the psychic was right all along. Another reason for persisting with the original statement is that most people are reluctant to say they are 100% *definite* and *certain* about something, especially if the psychic puts them on

the spot. They may well come up with some sort of link just to save feeling uncomfortable. It might go something like this:

"You're quite sure?"

"Pretty sure. I don't think I know anyone by that name."

"You're *absolutely positive* about that?"

"Well, I can't think of anyone. No, not really."

"You're saying you're *certain* that you know absolutely *nobody* with that name or one that sounds close to it, and you *never* have done?"

This may sound like rather aggressive bullying, but the psychic's manner and personality can make it seem quite acceptable. I have heard more than one radio psychic (under some pressure to deliver 'instant' results) use this kind of approach.

Very few clients will stick to their guns under this kind of questioning. However, if they do, the psychic simply moves on to the next phase - acting puzzled, and inviting the client to share her bewilderment. Incidentally, some psychics will also mention that they do *not* want the client to try and make the statement fit. This comes across as endearingly honest, but in fact it generally encourages the client to try even harder to help out. Continuing the same example, it might unfold along these lines:

"Well, all right, I don't understand it any more than you do. I'm getting this impression of the name Sarah, and whether it means anything to you or not, all I can tell you is the impressions I get. I'm not asking you to try and make it fit, that's not the point, but on the other hand I have to call it as I see it, and to be honest with you, I'm not often totally wrong. So will you carry on thinking about that? Because I feel sure there is a link there somewhere, but obviously it's not one that springs to mind for you..."

If the client does eventually remember someone called 'Sarah', the psychic gets extra points for the depth of her insight. If no such triumph emerges, the point simply gets forgotten and the psychic never mentions it again.

2. I am right, but you have forgotten

The psychic accounts for the discrepancy between her statement and the client's rejection by blaming the client's poor memory. Example:

"And when you were younger, I see an accident involving water. Does this make sense to you?"

If yes, it is a hit. If not, the psychic says:

"I sense it's going back some time, perhaps when you were really very young. You may not remember."

The psychic then smoothly progresses to the next part of the reading, with no harm done.

3. I am right, but you do not know

The discrepancy is attributed to the client not being in full possession of the facts. Example:

"I see the name Mark. Does this mean something to you?"

If yes, it is a hit. If not, then:

"I sense this person could be some professional connection on your husband's side. In fact you wouldn't necessarily know him that well."

4. I am right, but nobody knows

The psychic explains the discrepancy by saying that she has the facts, but neither the client nor anybody else does. Example:

"This uncle of yours, he has a problem with the chest area, doesn't he?"

If yes, it is a hit. If not, then:

"Of course he might not even *realise* it's his chest that's the problem. Perhaps it's a while since he had a check-up, but I can definitely see a minor problem there".

5. I am right, but it's embarrassing

The psychic suggests that although she is correct, there are reasons of taste or embarrassment which obscure the fact. Example:

"And as regards your grandfather... mmm, there was a problem with the law, wasn't there?"

If yes, it is a hit. If not, then:

"Actually, he may have kept rather quiet about it, and never told you. Sort of kept it 'hush hush'. I don't think there's any need to dwell on it".

6. I am wrong now, but I will be right soon

The rejection is attributed to the fact that the truth will not become evident for some time. Here is a simple example:

"I see the initials J and T. Do these mean something to you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Mm-um, yes, I'm pretty sure."

"Well, watch out for them because it's quite a definite impression, so they're coming up very soon, all right?"

This formula can be used the other way around. The psychic can offer a statement which refers to the future, and hastily re-shape it to fit the present if necessary:

"I also foresee that you, or someone close to you, will be moving house in the near future."

"Oh, well actually we just finished moving last week!"

"Is that right?! Well I could see you moving house, and for some reason I thought it was coming up in a week or so. Time is rather a fluid concept in the tarot..."

7. I am wrong, but it doesn't matter

The psychic makes the error seem a trivial distraction of no consequence. Example:

"And this house you lived in at the time, I see a number 2 on the door. That's right isn't it?"

If yes, it is a hit. If not, then:

"Well, all right, I'm obviously confused about the *exact* number but not to worry, this house that I'm seeing is the *important* thing, and the reason I want to mention this house is that..."

The psychic goes on to something completely different, with the problematic numeral entirely forgotten.

8. I am wrong in fact, but right emotionally

The psychic accepts she was wrong in terms of plain fact, but claims she was correct in terms of the client's inner needs or wants or desires.

Here is an example I remember from a reading given by an entertainer in the same field as myself. Giving a demonstration

for a journalist who had been born and raised in Ireland, he offered this statement:

"You used to have your hair long when you were younger, didn't you?"

'No, I've always worn it short, actually. Where I grew up we weren't allowed to have long hair."

My friend, thinking quickly, correctly guessed that if a young girl is forbidden to wear her hair long, she will probably develop a strong desire to do so. He therefore offered this follow-up statement:

"Ah, but you *wanted* to wear it long, didn't you?!"

The client agreed, and this was accepted as a hit! In fact, it was taken as evidence that the 'psychic vibrations' reveal our inner selves, not just outward appearances.

Another common example arises when discussing a client's youthful activities or early career ambitions. If the psychic suggests to the client that she was quite athletic when younger, this may be right or may be wrong. If wrong, it is usually worthwhile for the psychic to at least try offering a follow-up statement along these lines:

"Well, maybe you didn't pursue sports very much, but there are indications here of at least an interest, or a desire to, even if you didn't actually fulfil them."

This kind of modification often results in at least a partial agreement, which salvages the miss and converts it into a near-hit.

In many contexts, this kind of 'emotionally correct' hit is even more valued by clients than plain old factual accuracy, since it seems to hint that psychic gifts operate at some deeper, more profound level. This is often considered an intriguing and entertaining prospect. The rather mundane and uninspiring truth is that the psychics are simply offering excuses for failure which are as inventive as they are transparent. They do this with confidence, knowing that no client is ever likely to say this:

"Ah, but you didn't say anything about what I <u>wanted</u>. You actually said I <u>had</u> long hair when I was young. If this had been true, you would have claimed this as evidence of your psychic ability. But it isn't true, and yet you <u>still</u> want the credit for being right. This is patently absurd."

Then again, if a fair number of people read Section Four of this book there may be more than a few clients prepared to challenge psychics in this manner.

9. I am wrong in fact, but right within system

The psychic accepts she was wrong in terms of plain fact, but right in the terms of the psychic or divinatory system she is using. For example, if the psychic is giving a tarot reading, she may hazard a guess that the client has a sister, and make a statement accordingly:

> "And I see some sort of financial transaction involving your sister."

If the client rejects this on the basis that she does not *have* a sister, the psychic immediately chimes in with something like this:

> "Well, actually, within tarot we use 'sister' to mean any female with whom you have a close friendship or whom you know well..."

Broadening and adapting the meaning in this way provides a much greater chance of obtaining a hit or a near-hit. Similarly, the astrologer may offer something like this:

> "And if I go back to last September, the influence of Pluto in your fifth house at this time would suggest you benefited financially, or came into some money."

If the client rejects this, the astrologer can smoothly introduce this kind of revision:

> "Well, I said 'money', but in astrological terms we rarely think of wealth as purely coins and hard cash. What I really meant was wealth in terms of your life and fulfilment, that kind of wealth."

Provided the client can think of any bit of good news during the period referred to, the psychic can count this as another hit.

Spiritualists are especially liberal with their use of this method. Since they alone can tell us how those in the spirit world think and feel, they can invoke whatever explanations seem expedient at the time. The commonest example arises when the psychic has mis-stated the client's relationship to the person coming through from the spirit world:

> "And I have an elderly gentleman with me now who says you may well have been trying to communicate with him, since he passed recently. I sense this could be your father."

At this point the client might point out that her father is still alive, but that her brother passed recently. The psychic might then ask a Direct Question to establish that the client's brother was older than her, and then say:

> "Oh, I understand now. What he meant was that when you were both young, there were often times when he was left with responsibility for you, and he was almost like a father figure to his little sister."

This would be another triumph for the special semantic licence granted to psychics. There are always themes and variations available to the skilled cold reader. In the example above, it really does not matter whether or not the brother's age turns out to be convenient. Even if he had been much, much younger, the psychic could offer a line like this:

> "Oh, yes, he's coming through more clearly now. It was me that was in a muddle, not your brother! I got the word 'father' and I jumped the gun. He was trying to explain to me not that he *was* your father, but that you and he both had the *same* father... that's right, isn't it?"

And so on to the rest of the reading. There is always a way out!

10. Wrong small print, right headline

The psychic accepts a correction as confirmation that she was, broadly speaking, right all along. Example:

> "And was there a problem with the wheels on this car?"

If the car did indeed have wheel problems (as many cars do) then it is another hit. If not, and the client says it was the brakes that were faulty, then:

> "Oh it was the brakes, was it? OK, then, but you *did* have a problem with the car, that's right isn't it?"

Another triumph for psychic powers. A slight refinement is for the psychic to hint that she got something wrong only because she did not use her own gifts properly, like this:

> "Oh it was the brakes, was it? Well that'll teach me! I *wanted* to say 'brakes' but then I got this impression about the wheels. I should learn to trust my first instincts, shouldn't I? OK, then, but nonetheless I got this problem with the car, and that's right isn't it?"

11. Accept, apologise, and move on

This is the last refuge! If all else fails, the psychic can at least say something like this:

> "OK, well when I'm wrong I'm wrong, and I'm not too proud to admit it. I wish I could always be a 100% right, but then don't we all? Anyway, let me move on to the next area I want to look at with you, which is travel..."

In this way the psychic cuts her losses and moves on. She leaves the problem behind, where it will be quietly forgotten, and at the same time she comes across as extremely honest.

Progress Review

At this stage we are more than half way through Section Two. We have looked at The Set Up, Principal Themes and Elements. We have also seen how the psychic gets out of awkward errors or rejected statements, using Win-Win techniques. So far, we have not looked at the Presentation of the reading, so that is the next stage.

How it works 5/7: Presentational Points

There is more to cold reading than getting the actual content right. Purely presentational factors can also greatly assist the success of a reading. This section looks at some of the more important presentational points. I have used some of these myself, and can vouch for the fact that they make a significant difference to the cold reading process.

1. Cultivating feedback

In theory, a psychic reading could consist of the psychic doing all the talking and the client doing all the listening. Cold reading can work under these circumstances, and indeed postal readings cannot work any other way. However, the cold reading process clearly works best if the client provides plenty of responses, feedback and information. For this reason, the psychic does whatever she can to make sure the reading becomes an interactive dialogue.

In this respect, some clients need less encouragement than others. Some confirmed believers are inclined to talk almost non-stop, thereby greatly facilitating the cold reading process. However, the majority of clients are less generously forthcoming. They may be shy, wary, naturally reserved or downright sceptical and waiting to see the psychic 'prove' her abilities. In these cases, the psychic has to work to overcome this reticence. There are many ways of doing this, some more subtle than others.

How the psychic encourages feedback

One technique psychics use to cultivate feedback is to develop the kind of calm, intimate 'ambience' that we looked at earlier as part of The Set Up. The more at ease the client, the more likely she is to lower her defences.

Another is to provide plenty of prompts, which is to say conversational cues for the client to respond. We looked at a number of these in the section on 'Extracting information'. It also pays for the psychic to be a good listener, who provides plenty of time for the client to talk openly, even if she is not especially confident or articulate.

Open and closed questions

Psychics also strive to make sure that they ask open' questions rather than 'closed' ones. This distinction will be familiar to anyone who knows about sales and inter-personal skills. In case you have not met these terms before, a closed question is one which can be simply answered 'yes/no' or 'agree/disagree'. They do not promote good interaction. An open question cannot be answered this way, and forces the respondent to provide more detail. Open questions are much better for promoting and sustaining conversation. Here is a simple illustration of a closed question:

"Are you interested in music?"

The other person might simply say yes or no. There is no conversational flow, and it is then up to the first person to think of something else to say. Here is the open version:

"Tell me, what sort of music do you like?"

Now the other person has to think of more to say, and the conversation progresses beyond the rather banal level of 'yes/no' 'agree/disagree'.

Eye contact

Another way in which psychics promote response is to make good use of direct eye contact. When you sustain direct eye contact with someone, you simultaneously (i) signal that you find them interesting (ii) hold and guide their attention (iii) encourage them to pay attention to you. These three factors all encourage the other person to trust you and talk to you. Maintaining eye contact is not the same thing as staring, which has precisely the opposite effect.

Body language

I have already expressed my cautious stance towards the 'science' of body language. Nonetheless, if only for completeness, let me mention some body language factors which are theoretically relevant.

One is for the psychic to incline her head slightly left or right when listening to the client. According to theory, this is subconsciously interpreted as a signal of co-operative/consenting attitude, rather than aggressive/confrontational. It therefore promotes the client's sense of security, and diminishes any confrontational aspect to

the proceedings.

Venturing further into the realm of body language, the psychic may also take care to synchronise her own breathing pattern with that of the client. This is said to be a very subtle yet effective way to build a sense of rapport and mutual well-being. Another is for the psychic to align her own posture, or stance, with that of the client, so that they are not in what is called a 'crossing' or 'conflicting' position. In case the jargon is not clear enough, here is the theory. When you are talking to someone, imagine a line running across your body, connecting your shoulders. Imagine a similar line on the other person. The more parallel the lines, the more interested and sympathetic you seem to be to the other person. If the lines diverge or cross, this has the opposite effect.

I have tried the incline of the head and the posture alignment, and I can only report that they *seem* to work. Whether they *actually* work or not is for others to say.

So far, we have seen that the psychic can try numerous ways to encourage the client to provide feedback. The next question is, what *kinds* of feedback is she after?

Different types of feedback

Clients can provide several different types of feedback. Obviously, the most direct kind is **verbal.** As well as listening to *what* the client says, the psychic also listens to:

- stress and emphasis
- tone and manner

Let us consider a simple response such as:

"I wouldn't say that was entirely true."

If you try saying this out loud, but emphasising a different word each time, you will see how this makes a huge difference to what the client actually means, which in turn makes a difference to what the psychic can infer from the response.

I wouldn't say that was entirely true. (But others might, there are different viewpoints.)

I **wouldn't** say that was entirely true. (I'm quite emphatic about this.)

I wouldn't **say** that was entirely true. (But I might think it, or feel it, or I might not be willing to commit myself either way.)

I wouldn't say **that** was entirely true. (But other parts of what you've said seem accurate.)

I wouldn't say that was **entirely** true. (But you're more right than you are wrong.)

I wouldn't say that was entirely **true.** (Some of it is open to interpretation, speculation or doubt, but I'm not emphatically denying it.)

Even if the stress and emphasis is relatively even, the *manner* in which the client responds can tell the psychic as much as the words themselves, or even more. Such factors as the client's phrasing, pace, responsiveness, choice of words, tone of voice and confidence of expression can all convey a great deal about what she is thinking and feeling. The 'I wouldn't say that was entirely true' response can be said so as to indicate any of the following:

- strong denial and disagreement
- a dismissively sceptical and perhaps even sarcastic attitude
- a genuine difficulty in assessing how true the statement is
- indecision, reluctance to declare a verdict
- evasiveness and a tendency to 'sit on the fence' rather than commit to any one, single interpretation
- broad agreement, tinged with a mild doubt about fine details
- partial agreement, unimpressed with the psychic's inability to do better
- partial agreement, but very pleased with the psychic's brilliance

A second important source of feedback is the client's **facial expression.** We all know from everyday life that this often provides many subtle clues to someone's thoughts. Similarly, subtle shakes and nods of the head can provide fairly clear signals.

A third source of feedback is provided by the client's **gestures and mannerisms** - from idle fidgeting with her hands, to scratching her ear or running her hand through her hair. Some cold reading sources set great store by this kind of feedback, and take pains to detail many correlations between thought or mood X and gesture or mannerism Y. I consider this kind of 'analysis' to fall somewhere between idle fantasy and misleading exaggeration. Reliable examples of such a close correlation must

be few and far between. If a client scratches her nose, she may - as some would have us believe - be signalling a lack of truthfulness or a subconscious desire to shield herself from a perceived threat. Then again, she may just have an itchy nose.

What is true is that clients generally remain blissfully unaware of the feedback they provide. In one demonstration I gave for BBC Television, the client maintained afterwards that she had tried hard not to give anything away. The video playback showed that she was nodding or shaking her head, giving me the plainest possible 'yes' or 'no' guidance, all the way through the reading.

How psychics use feedback

Given that the psychic encourages feedback, and that it comes in several different forms, how does this assist the success of the psychic reading?

First of all, it helps the psychic to determine which of the Principal Themes the client is most interested in. This strengthens the inexplicability of the process ("Gee, how did she know about that tough decision I'm facing?"), and also makes the reading seem more relevant and worthwhile.

Secondly, it helps the psychic to gauge the extent to which the client agrees, or disagrees, with any statement she offers. The psychic capitalises on the strongest hits, and allows the misses to quietly fall by the wayside.

Perhaps most significantly, the different kinds of feedback help to reveal conflicts between what the client *says* and what she actually *feels.* This can be a very valuable aspect of cold reading. Clients often give responses which are less than honest, especially if something comes up which they consider embarrassing or sensitive. It can be very helpful for the psychic to perceive this.

To take a simple example, suppose that the psychic decides to mention financial concerns (a very common theme). Suppose also that the client happens to have some money worries, but denies it out of embarrassment. If the client's unspoken gestures tell a different story, the perceptive cold reader may decide to return to this theme, suggesting with feigned bewilderment that the cards seem in conflict with the client's own assurances that all is well. This will greatly impress the client (and everyone she tells afterwards). It also strengthens the illusion that 'psychic forces' unerringly detect the truth. This is good for trade.

To sum up, psychics try to make the reading into a dialogue rather than a monologue. They have many good ways of encouraging feedback, and of putting it to good use. This is an important aspect of cold reading, and one which clients often fail to notice. Many clients leave after a reading believing that they merely listened to a series of astonishing psychic revelations. They may never be aware that in fact they provided a rich fund of information and feedback.

2. Sensory empathy

If there is one presentational technique which distinguishes the truly skilled cold reader from the rest, this is it. Whenever I have witnessed psychics using this technique, I have always been impressed by the way it can transform a relatively flat reading into an unforgettable psychic experience.

It is all to do with the difference between merely stating something and actually feeling it - or at least pretending to do so convincingly. The psychic *acts* if she can *feel* the same things the client feels - the same sensory experiences and the same emotions. If she talks about the client being anxious or upset, she acts as if she can 'feel' the same sort of anxiety and emotional pain. If she talks about the client's recent happiness in connection with romance, she acts as if she 'feels' and 'experiences' some of that inner delight, happiness and joy.

There are limits to how well this point can be conveyed in print, but let us look at an example. Consider a tarot reader who is offering a simple Greener Grass statement based on the choice between urban and rural life. It might sound something like this:

> "In some ways the cards are telling a story of conflict and an inner restlessness. What this seems to be about is the inner you, and the you that you feel you have become. The impression I get is that you are quite well-adjusted to the hustle and bustle of city life. Of course there's stress and strain, because city life can be quite hectic, can't it? But you would seem to fit in quite well.
>
> However, the cards tell a deeper story, and indicate you have an affinity for the open air, the countryside and the chance to get away from it all. I don't mean just idle escapism or daydreaming, everyone does a bit of that. I mean you've given this some serious thought, and you've often contemplated this alternative, walking through leafy country lanes in the morning or being able to enjoy that morning breeze coming in off the coast, and I see times in the past when you have found

yourself, perhaps sitting alone in your room, considering what your life might have been like outside the bright lights the big city."

As a slice of typical psychic patter, this is as good as it needs to be. It can be made far more effective if the psychic acts out a range of different *sensory impressions,* pretending that she has a sensitivity to everything the client senses or feels emotionally.

When the psychic mentions the client's "inner restlessness", she can use her voice, facial expression and posture to convey feelings of stress and strain - as if she herself is *feeling* and *experiencing* what the client has felt and experienced.

When she says "hustle and bustle", she could offer a gesture of clamping her hands flat over her ears to drown out the cacophony of sounds - street noises, traffic, sirens, phones ringing all day - which assault the client's hearing on a daily basis.

When she talks about "the open air", she could perhaps close her eyes and breathe in deeply as if savouring the clean, invigorating air at the top of an Alpine peak.

When she refers to "beaches and the chance to get away from it all", she could look and sound as if she is inwardly transported to an idyllic tropical paradise, feeling warm all over, shading her eyes a little from the golden sunshine.

I am not suggesting the psychic throws herself around in a rather manic exhibition of erratic emotional display. It can be subtle, and still devastatingly effective. By seemingly detecting sensations that the client herself has experienced, and apparently empathising with them to the point where she (the psychic) *also experiences them,* she can make the reading a hundred times more captivating than it would be otherwise.

Variety and relevance

Psychics who use this technique appreciate the need to 'tap into' a *range* of sensations - what is seen, what is heard, what is touched, what is felt emotionally, and so on. This lends variety to the proceedings, and makes the psychic's sensitivity seem all the more comprehensive.

It is also obviously important to make sure the sensation or emotion being 'sensed' is relevant to the reading. The psychic offering aura readings, and focusing on health issues, 'feels' the nagging pain in the lower back which the client has experienced. The clairvoyant sensing the client's love of music 'hears' in the

psychic distance some of that delightful, delicate piano music the client so often enjoys. The psychic demonstrating psychometry, and handling a key which belongs to a car mechanic, 'feels' grease under the fingernails, and 'smells' the engine oil when describing the client's working day. The spiritualist relating details of late Uncle Walter's heart condition winces slightly as she 'feels' some of the chest pains and concerns which Walter suffered. The astrologer commenting on her client's rather over-zealous keep-fit regime 'feels' some of the exhaustion and fatigue which her client experiences at the end of every workout. And so on.

At the risk of labouring the point, this presentational technique can be incredibly powerful. It amplifies the value of almost every kind of psychic element, and substantially transforms the client's experience.

3. The cream principle

When you are adding cream to coffee, it is wise to start with just a little, and then add more if you want. If you put too much in to begin with, you cannot get it out again. It is the same with cold reading. Psychics generally offer weak statements to begin with, rather than strong ones, because it is by far the safest strategy. For example, rather than saying this:

> "You've had some major health problems with your back."

the wise psychic would generally offer this:

> "I think you've had a little bit of back trouble now and again, haven't you?"

This element of caution gives the psychic two chances of being right. If the original, weak statement is correct, then it is a hit. On the other hand, if the client indicates that the original statement was not strong enough, the psychic makes the adjustment while sounding like she was correct all along:

> *"Well, that's putting it mildly. I've had several major back operations in my life."*
>
> "Yes, I could see it was a problem area. I didn't want to dwell on it too much for that very reason. But nonetheless, it's right isn't it?"

And the psychic triumphs once again. Trying to turn a strong statement into a weak one sounds far less convincing. Unless it is done exceptionally well, it tends to sound false. Later in this book I provide an example of one of my own early TV demonstrations,

in which I made this very error. During the reading, I made initial statements which were far too bold and direct. In later readings, I soon learned the benefit of using the Cream Principle.

4. Emphasising the conditional

Psychics place the emphasis on could / would / should statements which refer to possibilities, rather than facts. Why? Because then they *cannot* be wrong! A moment's consideration should make this clear. If a client is told she is very creative, she may think this is true, or then again she may not. If she is told she *could* be very creative, or that she *should* be exploring her creative side more, she cannot disagree.

There are numerous constructions and expressions which turn an 'is' to a 'could be', and psychics use them all. For example, take a simple piece of Fine Flattery, like this:

> "You are very good with people, and know how to develop rapport."

This is a fairly safe piece of flattery, and few clients are going to offer any resistance to the idea. However, some unusually honest and self-critical clients might venture to disagree, and claim that they are terrible with people! In this situation, consider all these variants open to the psychic:

> "You have the *potential* to be very good with people..."
>
> "There are aspects of your character which suggest you *might* well be good with people..."
>
> "There are indications that you *could* be a good people-person..."
>
> "The impression I have is that you *ought to be* very good at handling people, given the right opportunities to develop this side of your character..."
>
> "You *should* be very good with people. If you don't think you are, then something's blocking this potential within you..."

All of these variations are unfalsifiable, and cannot be demonstrably wrong. It is not hard to take almost any piece of plain, factual observation and wrap it in the secure blanket of a could / would / should statement.

5. Providing room for interpretation

In the course of a reading, the client often *hears* more detail than the psychic *provides.* Given rather bland statements which leave room for interpretation, the client will often *supply* extra detail in her mind, which renders the statement more relevant to her own life.

This is perhaps one of the strangest aspects of presentational technique. It means the psychic can enjoy credit for knowing something when, in fact, she has no idea what she is being credited with knowing! Here is an example from one of my own readings:

> "And I think that two to three years ago there was at least one romantic line which became entangled."

At the time I offered this statement, I did not know what relevance, if any, it would have to the client. She thought about it for a couple of seconds, and then remembered an incident to which she could make it refer. To this day, I have absolutely no idea what she was thinking about. The client had convinced herself that I was referring to this one, specific incident in her past. She said this was "exactly" what happened, adding that she preferred not to discuss it any further (the reading was being taped for television). This was my cue to appear kind and gallant, and I agreed to drop the subject - still without the faintest notion what 'the subject' was! (As with all my TV demonstrations, the true extent of my 'psychic' ability was tactfully revealed at a later stage.)

Clients provide this kind of supplementary detail both during the reading and also afterwards, when discussing what took place. A simple Fuzzy Statement like this:

> "I see a process of transition which could be linked with the workplace"

can become remembered like this:

> *"...she also told me I was going to be changing jobs soon, which is true because next month I'm taking over the new regional office."*

I have seen this happen on many occasions, with regard to my own readings and others. The psychic does not have to do anything to encourage this - it happens quite naturally. All the psychic has to do is play along with it, and take the credit.

6. Forking

Forking means offering statements which can be developed in two different directions. If the client accepts the initial statement, then the psychic strengthens it and adds further embellishment. If the client rejects the initial statement, then the psychic performs a U-turn, and drastically modifies the statement to make it more palatable. We looked at this technique briefly in connection with Barnum Statements. Example:

> "You have a strong desire to be liked and admired, and seek credit for your achievements."

If the client agrees, the psychic develops this thread into something more substantial:

> "In fact sometimes this feeling, this tendency to pursue approval, goes a bit too far. If you're honest you recognise that you have, on occasion, come across as a little too keen for praise in the eyes of others. I feel this is an area in your life where there is an opportunity for growth and for development. As you are already beginning to learn, your own knowledge of your achievements is more important than what other people say or think".

If the client disagrees, the psychic needs to reverse it to make it acceptable:

> "But you have learned to keep this tendency well hidden, suppressed if you like, and it's not something that your friends would recognise in you. You often let the credit go elsewhere without making a fuss. You have learned to enjoy the easy life rather than get into acrimonious disputes about who deserves credit for what".

In this way, the psychic can always come out on top, no matter what sort of client she happens to be reading for at the time.

Forking and factual statements

It is easy to see that in terms of general character statements, forking is a very useful technique. It allows the psychic to always be totally right, or mostly right. However, forking also allows the psychic to make direct factual assertions. Here is a relatively trite example, which will serve nonetheless to illustrate the options available to the psychic:

> "You used to own a dog."

If the client agrees, the psychic proceeds to say more about this delightful dog from days gone by. But what if the client rejects this

statement? What if she never owned a dog? In this case, the psychic forks in the opposite direction: Here is one way she might do this:

> "Okay, I didn't mean you actually *owned* one as such. What I mean is that I sense you once *considered* owning a dog. It was in your mind, and I can see you discussing this with someone."

This way of correcting a blatant error is called 'I am wrong in fact, but right emotionally', and is one of the Win-Win game techniques. Here is another option:

> "Well not a dog specifically. I didn't mean that. A dog was just the first thing that came to my mind, but there was a domestic pet that meant a lot to you or your family, something you fussed over and liked".

And yet another option:

> "Mmm, that's strange, I can definitely see you patting this dog and taking it for walks and things - was it a dog belonging to a friend, or to someone who lived in the same house, even if you didn't actually own the dog?"

And one more option for good measure:

> "All right, you didn't *own* a dog, as such, but there was this dog you *knew* - I can see you playing with one, enjoying fussing over it. Perhaps it belonged to your relatives or close family friends you used to visit. I can see you visiting this house, and there's this dog that jumps up when it sees you, yap yap yap!, and this is definitely a dog you know or knew at the time."

The beautiful thing about forking is that is entirely invisible. The client never knows what the psychic *would* have said if her own response had been different. This is what makes forking such a powerfully deceptive aspect of cold reading.

Psychics cannot use forking all the time with every element. It is far more effective if the psychic is content to let a few things go by as outright misses or errors. For some reason, clients accept this as a by-product of the psychic process and tend to be very forgiving!

Forking is difficult because it needs to be done instantly and smoothly, with no detectable crashing of gears. However, to a psychic who has taken the time to develop this facility, it is immensely useful. Incidentally, note that forking cannot be used with a 'Push Statement'. With a Push Statement, the psychic is inescapably committed to one direction.

7. Keeping it clear

Like a good actor or presenter, the psychic tries to make sure that everything she says is clear, easy on the ear and easily understood. This makes it easy to retain the client's concentration and attention, which in turn gives the psychic access to her attention and her responses. This is a simple Presentational Point which applies as much to cold reading as it does to any other performing role.

8. Keeping it 'folksy'

Psychics know the value of keeping their readings informal in tone, and easy to digest. We looked at this point earlier, in connection with the element I called 'Folk wisdom'. This is obviously a matter of personal style, but in general psychics strive to keep their readings colourful, entertaining, and easy to appreciate. They take care to express themselves using a vocabulary appropriate to the client, and to include figures of speech and examples to which the client can relate. This makes the experience easier to accept and understand, and also encourages the client to join in.

9. Sustaining pace

Psychics know the value of sustaining a flowing, easy-going delivery. This allows the psychic to (a) get through plenty of different elements, waiting to see which ones are worth developing and (b) smoothly get past misses and disagreements. It also means the client does not get too much time to analyse the reading's content.

10. Reprising with gold paint

This is another very important Presentational Point, and one which has boosted the success of many psychic readings. It simply involves the psychic reviewing and revising each section of the reading in a manner heavily biased in her own favour. This affects what the client remembers of the reading, Take this example:

> "I sense that when you were quite young you had quite a serious accident, possibly involving water. Can you make sense of this for me?"
>
> *"Not really. There was something along those lines, but I wasn't really very young at the time."*

In essence, the client has rejected the statement. However, she has hinted that there is some past event which could provide a partial match. The psychic now uses a standard manoeuvre to get around this miss, such as 'Wrong small print, right headline' (see the earlier section on The Win-Win Game). At the same time, she forks away from her initial statement with a little light humour:

"Well, something that happened when you were younger *than you are now,* we can agree on that!..."

'Yes, of course..."

"...and what I'm getting is an accident, an illness, something that laid you low for a while or had those around you worried. It's a very strong impression indeed."

'Yes, well if it's what I think it is, it was a car accident. But I was the cause, not the victim. I was about 19 and I hadn't been driving long."

Now the psychic is more or less home and dry. The client has provided all the information, and recalled an event which bears very little relation to the psychic's original offering. The psychic builds on this information, and at the same time starts introducing the Reprise:

"So, this car accident that I saw in your youth, the sense I get is that this is an event where you learned some lessons, and those lessons are still with you today. Lessons about your sense of responsibility, and the need to mix caution with confidence. I feel this has been an important area of inner growth for you, which could be why I got such a strong impression along these lines..."

In this reprise, the psychic has twice referred to having accurately seen this car accident from years ago. In fact, she mentioned no such thing. When the client thinks back over the reading, or tells others about it, she may well retain the impression that the psychic got this right.

Rapid reprise

Reprising with Gold Paint can be used in many psychic readings, and can be accomplished in the blink of an eye. To see what I mean, imagine a psychic is giving a spiritualist reading. Furthermore, suppose she has guessed - erroneously - that the person 'in spirit' is *not* a relative of the client, but a close personal friend. The psychic might say something like:

"And this person who's coming through, this is someone who you were very close to for many years, and you had a lot of

good times together, isn't that right?"

"Well, if it's the person I'm thinking of, it's my father."

"Oh well in that case you certainly were very close weren't you? So this is making sense to you isn't it?".

'Yes it is."

"I thought so, and what your father is telling me is that he remembers playing with you on a holiday you had that was near the beach..."

The psychic has quietly shifted from "someone you were very close to" to "your father" but only *after* the client provided this identification. The psychic's original vagueness (or error, depending how you look at it) is quietly left to wilt on the vine of forgetfulness, and the client is left feeling that the psychic had more or less identified her father before she said a word.

11. Summarising the reading

At the end of the reading, if circumstances permit, experienced psychics try to conclude with a brief summary of the territory covered. This is another chance to include some of the biased revision mentioned earlier, under 'Reprise with Gold Paint'. It allows the psychic to emphasise the parts that went well, and to gloss over those which were less successful. This affects how the client remembers the reading, which in turn affects how she describes it to others.

It is widely acknowledged by people who have looked into this area that clients generally remember their readings inaccurately. I myself have seen clients refer enthusiastically to details in my own readings which were never actually there.

12. Looking good for the crowd

So far, this section has focused on presentational techniques which enhance the reading in the eyes of the client. There is one more presentational technique which is aimed at *onlookers*, rather than the client herself, and it a gem.

Psychics often give readings in circumstances where other people can *see* what is going on, although they cannot hear what is being said. This is often the case at corporate parties or fairgrounds, for example, where people can see (but not hear) the psychic and her current client sitting facing each other. In these circumstances, it is very impressive if people see that the client is

nodding a great deal, and seems to be agreeing with the psychic's every word. All this nodding of the head and fervent agreement creates the impression that the psychic is dispensing many pearls of wisdom, all deadly accurate and intuitively sound.

However, the client's conspicuous nodding and outer signs of agreement may have *nothing to do with the content of the reading.* The psychic may simply be peppering her reading with *nodding prompts.* These include phrases such as "Can you hear what I'm saying?", "Can you hear me OK?" and "Can you understand the words I'm using?" This is an old ruse, but it works like a charm. We have already seen how important it is for the psychic to keep her reading clear and audible. However, the psychic can do this and at the same time employ a *relatively* soft tone of voice, supposedly in the spirit of confidentiality. If she does this, and liberally sprinkles her reading with nodding prompts, the client can be made to nod her head as if she were watching a yo-yo.

From a little distance away, this creates the perfect illusion of the client firmly endorsing every shimmering utterance which falls from the psychic's lips. This is very good for trade.

Progress Review

Section Two is sub-divided into seven sections, and so far we have covered five of them. First, we looked at The Set Up, or how the psychic tries to get the conditions right for a successful reading. Next, we looked at the actual content of the reading itself - the Principal Themes and what I called the Elements. Each element provides a different way of saying something that sounds suitably psychic in nature, without any need for real psychic faculties.

We have also looked at the Win-Win Game, or how psychics cover up mistakes during the reading. In the most recent section, we considered the different Presentational Points which are also part and parcel of the cold reading process.

The next area to consider is how all these methods and techniques are stitched together into a psychic reading.

How it works 6/7: Putting it all together

The psychic toolbox

An experienced builder has a good set of tools, which enable him to cope with most situations. The more tools and equipment he has, the greater the range of jobs he can handle. There may be some tools that he trusts and relies on more than others, and his preferences will reflect his own individual style of working.

Likewise with the psychic. The techniques and elements we have looked at so far are the tools of her trade - a sort of 'Psychic Toolbox' - which can be used to construct readings. It makes no sense to use *every* tool for *every* reading. All the psychic has to do is use the right tools to 'build' the right reading for each client. The more tools the psychic has at her disposal, the more versatile she is, and the more clients she can impress and satisfy.

So the first point to emphasise is that 'putting it all together' is very much a case of personal style, and this varies tremendously from one psychic to the next.

Almost improvising

Putting it all together is also largely a matter of *improvisation.* Before the psychic begins the reading, she may have only the vaguest idea of what she is going to say. This is not a problem. Provided she has a good repertoire of techniques and elements at her disposal, she should be able to cope with just about any client she meets.

Nonetheless, there are very few readings which can be said to be *totally* improvised. Every cold reader has a few elements, or a few statements, which have become favourites over time, and which she will be inclined to use more than others. Of course, this will not be obvious to any one individual client - it would only become clear if one were able to study many readings given by the same psychic over a period of time.

Principal phases

Given that readings vary according to personal style, and are generally improvised rather than scripted, there is no one way to 'put it all together' and fashion a psychic reading. However, the majority of normal one-on-one readings can be said to proceed

through the same five main phases:

- Set Up & Disarm
- Launch
- Bridge
- Expand
- Tidy Conclusion

I will describe each one, and add some notes from my own experience of giving readings.

Set Up and Disarm

To begin with, the psychic employs whichever 'Set Up' techniques are appropriate to the psychic's style, the client, and the context of the reading (see 'The Set Up'). It is obviously up to the psychic to choose the techniques she feels will be most effective, based on her own experience. She must also be on the alert for any potential problems - such as a very hostile or sceptical client - and defuse them.

In my own readings, I generally tend to focus on just two 'Set Up' techniques: encouraging co-operative interpretation, which I regard as more or less essential, and establishing the belief system. In addition, I always watch for signs of either nervousness or scepticism.

If the client seems nervous, it is clearly important to set her at ease. I try to ascertain why she is nervous, simply by asking, and provide whatever reassurances she requires. Not only is this conducive to a successful reading, it can also yield good clues as to the direction the reading should take.

If the client is suspicious or sceptical, I tend to play down the belief system (since this can only invite confrontation) and talk about the reading in more down-to-earth and rational terms. For example, I might suggest that readings are akin to the exploration of psychological trends and archetypes, or that they constitute a form of intuitive counselling and advice in which the props (tarot cards, astrological data etc.) are just a means to an end. It is really just a case of saying whatever I feel might disarm, or diminish, the client's sceptical stance.

Launch

Next, the psychic has to actually start the reading. It is important for the reading to get off to a good start, and for this reason few psychics rely *purely* on improvised cold reading at this early stage. Most have a few phrases they have learned to trust, or an introductory framework they have polished over time. These tried-and-tested opening lines help the psychic to sound proficient, experienced and, most importantly of all, supremely confident.

Confidence is contagious. If a performer is confident, the audience sense it immediately. They relax, because they can tell the performer knows what she is doing. They also feel confident they will enjoy her work. This makes for a very relaxed and supportive atmosphere, so the performer can relax and enjoy her work more. This expectation builds rapport between performer and audience, which helps the performance to go well. When the performance goes well, this further enhances the performer's confidence, and so the circle goes round.

Lack of confidence is also contagious, and has precisely the opposite effect. The audience become tense (or bored), and anticipate having a rather disappointing time. This kills rapport, and the performance suffers accordingly. This undermines the performer's confidence, so forming a vicious circle.

This is why confidence is vitally important to any kind of performance, including cold reading. Unfortunately, confidence is not to be had just for the wanting. It only comes with experience. But it does come, and brings many rewards.

In terms of starting a reading, my own preference is to find some pretext for going back in time, and starting with the client's younger days. More or less any pretext will do, so long as it is vaguely appropriate to the context of the reading. Having started in this way, I then rely chiefly on a partially pre-set spiel which includes Fuzzy Facts and Childhood Memories to provide my first few minutes of material. If it difficult or impossible to go back in time, I tend to rely on a very safe yet potent cocktail of Jacques Statements and Fine Flattery statements to get things under way.

Bridge

Next, the psychic has to find a way to bridge from the start of the reading (only partially improvised) to the main body of the reading (almost entirely improvised). In this respect, she has two

main goals. The first is to touch on each of the Principal Themes to see which ones appear most important to the client. The second is to include two or three elements aimed at extracting information if she has not already done so.

Establishing which main theme to pursue is obviously important. Many clients come to a reading wanting help or advice about one specific matter. If the psychic manages to focus on the right area, this makes a good impression. On the other hand, if she talks at length about matters of little interest to the client, then the client will naturally be dissatisfied.

When it comes to extracting information, my two favourite elements tend to be the Veiled Question and Jargon Blitz.

Expand

The psychic is now well-prepared to improvise the main body of the reading, using whichever elements she prefers. She knows which theme(s) to emphasise, and she has extracted at least one or two crumbs of information which she can put to good use. With any luck, she has already successfully conditioned the client to co-operate with the process and to accept unquestioningly the strange rules by which the game is played.

In my own readings, I tend to rely chiefly on the Rainbow Ruse and Greener Grass statements. I also try to hit specific names, numbers and other details likely to impress the client, using Fuzzy Facts and the Good Chance Guess. In every reading, I usually chance my arm with at least one Lucky Guess and at least one Push Statement.

As the reading unfolds, the psychic gains feedback from the client all the time. This of course greatly influences the direction the reading takes. At any time, the psychic can try to extract more feedback information from the client, thus obtaining further signposts for the reading to follow. In this regard, I prefer the Russian Doll and the Jargon Blitz, which I find great fun to spin out of thin air.

This process of ongoing improvisation may sound rather risky and insecure. It is as well to bear in mind that psychics give readings all the time, whereas clients only have readings once in a while. Hence in any given reading, all the experience and readiness is on the side of the psychic. It is her game, and it is played by her rules. If a particular part of the reading is not going well, the psychic knows she can always cut that part short and

start talking about something else. If the client becomes difficult or awkward, the psychic can spot this at once, and deal with it effectively.

Tidy Conclusion

As you would expect, predictions about the future tend to come towards to end of the reading. In this regard, I usually play quite safe and use Pollyanna Pearls. The final phase of the reading consists of summarising all that has been said, in the rather biased manner described earlier, and bidding the client farewell with every good wish for the future.

And that is more or less all there is to it. Another reading over, another satisfied client.

Progress Review

We have now covered six of Section Two's seven sub-sections. We have seen in some detail how cold reading works, from start to finish.

There are really only two ways in which the cold reading process can fail. One is if the client is well-versed in cold reading, and knows how to block it. This is the subject of Section Four. The other is if the client is thoroughly and unshakeably sceptical. However, there are ways of coping with this, which we will look at next.

How it works 7/7: Coping with sceptics

It is rare for a psychic to meet a client who is well-informed and sceptical. Most clients are either believers or non-committal. Many subscribe to the argument about 'keeping an open mind'. Others may claim to be sceptical, but know nothing about cold reading.

The truly informed sceptic tends to stay away. However, even if a highly sceptical client does turn up, the cold reading process can cope. Here are the best lines of defence used by psychics.

Making no claim

One of the first things the psychic can do is try to disarm the sceptic. A good way to do this is to say that she makes no claims, and asks the client to believe in nothing. The guiding principle here is that a claim that is not made is a claim that cannot be disproved. A typical riff on these lines might go like this:

> "Let me say at the outset that I myself make no claims on behalf of the tarot (or astrology, etc.). All I can tell you is that millions of people find it is a useful way of enhancing their perspective on life, and perhaps opening a window to a broader appreciation of the cycles and themes in life which affect us all. But everyone is different, and it may turn out that the tarot is not something that works for you. All I ask is that you keep an open mind, enjoy the reading, and then in the weeks ahead you can see if it seems to work for you."

In this way, the psychic can defuse all possible sceptical challenges. She is effectively writing her own contract to suit herself. She cannot fail to deliver on her promises, because she has been careful not to make any. Nor has she made any promises on behalf of her particular discipline. She has not said it will reveal truths, solve problems or prove anything at all.

As an industry, the psychic trade has the best client contracts of all time: "You pay me, and I promise nothing in return". I suggest this should be regarded as a consumer rights issue, in which case the appropriate response is:

> *"If you're not promising anything, then what am I paying for?"*

Praising the caution

Another good disarming move is to *praise* the client's caution, and to express *approval* for her reluctance to embrace the psychic system on offer. Many psychics like to recycle neat little anecdotes

about how they too are of a very sceptical cast of mind, and only accepted astrology (tarot / palmistry / reading entrails) because they discovered that it really does work. Here is how an astrologer might go about doing this:

> "I can sense a degree of healthy scepticism in you, and let me say I absolutely applaud it. Believe me, no-one's more sceptical than I am. You probably feel there is a lot of mumbo-jumbo around, and I agree! Of course there is. And I think you're right to be sceptical - there's a lot to be sceptical about in this day and age isn't there? But listen, the only reason I became an astrologer was because I was able to discover for myself that it really does work, and that's what my clients tell me as well. It's the oldest science we have, and in some ways a very rational person like yourself stands to gain more from it than anyone else. So, let's get started shall we... "

And so the reading can begin. This preliminary spiel might not have any effect, but it will certainly not do any harm. At the very least, it stands a chance of building a degree of rapport.

Offering Sugar lumps

Another way to defuse sceptical attitudes was covered earlier, when we looked at 'Sugar Lump' statements i.e. offering the prospect of a pleasant emotional reward in return for believing. My other pet name for these is 'Soundbite Hugs'.

I first learned about Sugar Lump statements by being on the receiving end of one. At a psychic fair once, I was implored, to "open my heart as well as my mind" to the "warmth, love and guidance" that the psychic community can offer. I was also urged to avail myself of the "very real contribution" that psychic insights can provide in helping me achieve my goals.

I had my doubts at the time, and I still have them today. I am lucky enough to have plenty of warmth and love in my life, and I do not get it from highly irrational women wearing tacky pendants and too much make-up. As for my goals in life, I felt relatively safe ignoring long-term career advice from someone whose professional skill base consisted of warbling superstitious drivel while peering at some tatty tarot cards.

Giving up

If all else fails, and the psychic feels she is having a hard time, her simplest option is to stop the reading, give the money back and

move on to the next client who has 'shoe-in' stamped on her forehead. In the psychic world, giving up can be done without any loss of face whatsoever:

> "I don't feel that you are sufficiently receptive to what the tarot has to offer for the reading to be a good use of your time or mine. I am sorry about this, but I don't feel I'm the right reader for you, and as such the reading is over."

Another variation is to blame lack of rapport:

> "I want to be honest with you, and say that the success of any reading has a lot to do with the rapport between myself and whoever I'm reading for. In truth, I haven't felt able to develop the right kind of rapport with you that is conducive to a worthwhile reading. This isn't a criticism of you personally, but I don't feel I'm able to provide the sort of reading I'd feel was worth the time, and intuitive effort, that is involved."

The more confrontational approach is to suggest that sceptical attitudes themselves are somehow responsible for inhibiting or blocking psychic gifts:

> "I have to say that at this point I would like to end the sitting. You have made it clear that you are highly sceptical, and although that's your right, I honestly feel that your scepticism is preventing the consultation from being effective. Psychic sensitivity is very finely-balanced, and takes years to develop. If you are unsympathetic to this sensitivity, and I feel you are, this blocks the channels which are important to my work, and through which I was trying to help you. The reading is over."

Whichever approach the psychic uses, she is able to end the reading, cut her losses, and blame the failure on the client, bad vibes, blocked channels, the configuration of the stars or anything else that comes to mind. The other faintly possible explanation, that the whole thing could be a heap of medieval superstitious claptrap, is generally not mentioned.

Progress Review

In Section Two, the lengthiest in the book, we have seen how cold reading works, and shown how adaptable it can be. Having dealt with the theory, it is time to see some cold reading in action, which is the subject of Section Three. But first, a brief Interlude.

Interlude 1: "How do you explain that?"

I with was some friends the other day, and one of them told me about a psychic reading he once had. This happens to me quite often. I usually want to talk about the interesting things in life, such as guitars or the thankless quest to find truly excellent *fajitas* in London. But my friends, aware of my line of country, often prefer to discuss their tales from the psychic realm.

As occupational hazards go, it is not the worst I can think of. Besides, I am the first to admit that tales of psychic powers can be fun and intriguing. Nonetheless, I still wince inwardly whenever this happens. There are two reasons.

The first is that every such tale tends to be markedly similar to the last one I heard, and the one before that, and the two before that, and the ten before that... and so on. The second reason is that one particular phrase *always* crops up at the end of these stories. Let me share it with you.

My friend's story was about a psychic he saw early one year, before he had planned his holidays. During the reading, the psychic said my friend would go on holiday in October. Sure enough, October came round and he went on holiday. As far as my friend was concerned, this was evidence of uncanny psychic ability. Having finished his story, my friend sipped his drink and then said, "How do you explain that?".

And there you have it. That is the phrase. I can see it coming from miles away, and I quietly groan to myself whenever it looms on the horizon. May I take this opportunity to explain why.

Explaining things away

In the first place, I am not remotely interested in trying to 'explain things away', and nor is any other sceptic I have ever met. For me, being sceptical boils down to one thing: I like to believe in things that are true, and to avoid believing in things which turn out to be complete rubbish. As human beings, we are all prone to believing in rubbish, and life is not short of temptations and

opportunities to do so. Fortunately, there are some good ways of reducing the likelihood of this happening. Asking good questions is one. Getting well-informed about things is another. Trying to learn about good and bad reasoning is yet another.

I have tried to learn a few of these methods, and to apply them in everyday life. This does not make life boring, or soul-less, or devoid of joy and excitement and warmth and fun (if anything, quite the reverse). It just means I do not make quite as many dumb mistakes as I probably would otherwise. This is what I think it means to be 'sceptical'.

A question of recall

In the second place, it is worth looking at this whole business of being asked to 'explain' things. Like anyone else, I can only explain something if I can get at the facts, and a story told over a drink or two at the bar is not a set of facts. It is a recollection. A view. An impression of what someone *thinks* happened. Of course, my friend felt sure he knew *exactly* what happened during the reading, and *exactly* what was said. Alas, his confidence was probably misplaced.

Accurate recall is prone to at least four kinds of contamination. Generally speaking:

- people are not very good at *observing* things very accurately
- what little they observe well, they are not very good at *remembering* very accurately
- what little they remember well, they are not very good at *describing* very accurately to others
- and what little they describe well, they tend to *simplify* greatly

If you doubt the above is true, have a look at the formal academic research which has been done in this area. There is a lot of it, and it all points the same way: the human mind is wonderful in countless ways, but next to hopeless at accurately describing past experience.

If you do not care to check out the research, and I do not blame you, just try out your friends and family. Ask them to recall the opening words of the TV sitcom they have just watched, and not one of them will be able to tell you. Ask them to close their eyes and then describe what you are wearing, and very few will be able to remember the details (although women will do better than men). Many people cannot even say with certainty whether the

numerals on their own watch are regular 'Arabic' style (1, 2, 3) or Roman (I, II, III). Or which way the head faces on their country's coins and stamps. Try asking people to describe basic details of pictures which hang on their walls and which they see every day. Most people cannot even recall the opening words of this paragraph (no cheating!).

This is no great disgrace. Most of us have never developed great powers of accurate recall because we do not need to. Life is complicated enough, and we take in just enough details to get by. I do it myself, and you probably do too.

The fallibility of human recall is not the problem. The problem is the lack of *awareness* of this fallibility. When people adamantly insist that they can remember something very well, they are usually wrong, and this gives rise to difficulties. In relationships, it gives rise to rows about past conversations (the 'That's *not* what I said!' syndrome). In law, it gives rise to flawed eyewitness testimony. In many other fields, it causes all sorts of strife, conflicts and difficulties. All these problems would vanish if people were well aware that what they *think* happened may be seriously adrift of what actually *did* happen. This applies to sceptics just as much as to anyone else - although sceptics are probably more aware of the fact than most.

Trained observers?

In some instances, defenders of psychic phenomena contend that a particular witness is more credible than average, since he or she is professionally trained to be a good observer. This may be true, but only up to a point. Someone may have very good observational skills *in their own field of expertise*, but these skills do not necessarily translate to situations outside their professional domain. Doctors are trained to make good observations of patients and their symptoms. Police officers are trained to observe crime scenes accurately. However, in other contexts these people may be no more accurate than average, which is to say not very accurate at all.

Taped readings?

In the case of psychic readings, many clients these days come away with a tape recording of what took place (many psychics offer this service for a small extra fee). This merely relocates the problem, rather than eliminating it. A client may possess a tape of the reading. But how accurately does she recall and describe its

contents when talking to her friends? There is no way of knowing.

Nor can an audio tape convey the many other factors which *may* have been involved in the reading - such as prior information, visual clues and non-verbal client feedback.

Summary

To recap, when we hear someone describing what happened to them, we are usually getting a *simplified* account, not very well *described*, of something not very well *remembered*, of something not very well *observed* in the first place.

So how did the psychic predict my friend's October holiday? The answer is that I do not know if she did, and if she did I have no idea how. Perhaps it was an astonishing demonstration of authentic psychic precognition. Then again, maybe the psychic was as genuine as a 7 dollar bill and my friend was suckered by a piece of stylish cold reading. I was not there, and I have no way of finding out the facts which would inform my judgement either way. More to the point, I cannot get at the facts by listening to my friend's *recollection* of what took place.

It is impossible to 'explain' an anecdote. Even if it were possible, it is not what scepticism is all about.

Time, I feel, to get down off my soapbox and back to the subject of cold reading.

Section Three

Putting the theory to the test

"For the great majority of mankind are satisfied with appearance, as though they were realities, and are often more influenced by the things that seem than those that are."

- Niccolo Machievelli, 'Discourses'

Section 3: Putting the theory to the test

Introduction

This section features two examples from my own televised demonstrations of cold reading. In the first, I was asked to pose as a tarot reader, and in the second as an astrologer. Both of these demonstrations were given for British TV. I will also make passing reference to a third demonstration, for American TV, in which I posed as a clairvoyant.

Two points about me

My involvement with cold reading sometimes gives rise to two unhelpful misunderstandings. This seems like a good opportunity to clear them up.

The first misunderstanding is that I am psychic. This means I often get letters from people who mistakenly think I can help them run their lives. I have been asked about romantic partners, exam questions and missing pets. I cannot help with any of these things, since I am as psychic as a coffee pot. Maybe less.

The second misunderstanding is that I am some sort of con-artist. This means I get delightful letters from that very special community of people whose hobby is being angry about things they know nothing about. These pious, lovely people traduce me for my callous practices and vent their outrage at my wicked deceptions. It's one hell of a way to start Monday mornings.

I am not a con-artist. Among other things, I am a lecturer and entertainer with an interest in what real mind power is all about. For various reasons, including a well-spent youth, I happen to know about deception and how to fake psychic phenomena. In my shows, I often demonstrate a wide range of seemingly psychic phenomena, from spoon-bending to ESP. However, I always stress that I am deceptive, not psychic.

Sometimes, media people ask me to demonstrate that cold reading really works. They find someone willing to have a reading, and I strut my stuff. Afterwards, the person to whom I have given the reading is told the truth as tactfully and sensitively as possible. I also make it clear to the subject that having being taken in by cold reading does not mean she is gullible or lacking in intelligence.

Test conditions

The purpose of these demonstrations was to see if I could convince a complete stranger that I was genuinely psychic, purely by using cold reading. The majority of my TV demonstrations have been given under what I refer to as 'test conditions', defined as follows:

1. The TV people select the clients for the readings, and I have no say in their choice. All I usually ask is that the clients should be female, in the age range 21-55, since in real life most clients fall into this category.

2. I do not know the identity of the clients until the moment the readings begin, and I have no prior information about them.

3. Care is taken to choose clients who have no *strong* opinions about psychic ability either way (some have turned out to be mild believers, others mildly sceptical).

4. The clients are not told anything favourable about my abilities, or otherwise conditioned to believe in me. All they are told is that I am going to give them a reading, and that they will be asked for their honest comments afterwards - be they good or bad.

5. The reading has to last at least 20 minutes. It has to be reasonably detailed, and more than just a string of bland Barnum Statements.

6. Once the reading is over the client is to be interviewed separately, with no further involvement on my part. The client is to be asked for her honest opinion, without being prompted to say anything favourable. In the course of the interview, the client will be asked specifically to consider if I might have been some sort of fake.

7. I only have one chance to give each reading, without rehearsal, re-takes or breaks. I agree to the results being broadcast whatever the outcome.

8. I insist that after the reading and the interview, the truth is explained to the client as sensitively and inoffensively as possible - without making her feel gullible or foolish. She is to be told I am a fake (if she has not already come to this conclusion) and to have the purpose of the experiment explained to her in full.

Transcripts

At the beginning of Section Two, I emphasised that the examples in that section were purely hypothetical. In contrast, the examples in this section are genuine transcripts of actual readings I have given for television, and of the client's subsequent reactions.

Real conversational speech is neither as simple nor as tidy as fictional dialogue. In real life, people leave their thoughts incomplete, repeat themselves, mumble, mutter, and offer disjointed phrases. For all these reasons, a literal transcript can be difficult to read. Please bear this in mind.

I have made the transcripts as accurate and complete as I can. Some very minor edits have been made only where the original words, or fragments of words, would be impenetrably confusing. However, I have not cheated or made any misleading edits. I have neither omitted the 'misses', nor made the 'hits' look better than they really were.

Example 1: improvised tarot reading

Introduction

This first example is taken from a TV series called "The Talking Show", made by Open Media Productions for Channel 4 Television, a national terrestrial TV channel in the UK. The Open Media team were a pleasure to work with from start to finish, and I would like to pay tribute to all their hard work and good-natured professionalism in making this interesting experiment possible.

For this demonstration, the producers asked me to pose as a tarot reader, and to improvise the reading in a television studio. There was no studio audience present at the time - they were shown edited tapes of the readings later as part of the actual show.

The client

The client for this first example turned out to be a young woman called Susie, in her late twenties or early thirties. She was tall, slim, well-dressed and very well-spoken. She came across as being well-educated, pleasant, and quite interested in the reading although not particularly co-operative. At first meeting, she appeared rather solemn, but in the early stages of the reading it became clear she had a very likeable sense of humour. Although she was responsive, she was not very talkative. She generally offered only very brief, monosyllabic responses.

The reading

Here is the full transcript of the reading I gave to Susie:

Me: "Your name is?"

Susie: *"Susie."*

"Is that short for...?"

"Susan."

"...Susan or Susannah?"

"Susan."

"Okay. Let's talk about what we're going to do today. The first thing is I'd like to know if you've had a reading done before."

"Never".

"Never? Is this because you don't believe or you..."

"Er, I suppose there's never been one [a tarot reader] around when I've thought about it! Er, I don't believe or not believe."

"Okay, that's what we call an open mind."

"An open mind, yeah."

"Well, what I'd like you to do - not that you're here to do things for me, I'm going to try and do my best for you..."

"Okay."

"...what I'd like you to do is to forget about all these people [the TV crew] who are watching us and listening. We won't go into anything that's too private. We won't go into any bad news or anything like that. The first thing I'd like to do, is just explain that the cards will be your cards."

"Right."

"What they mean will probably mean more to you than to me."

"Yep."

"But I will do what I can for you."

"Uh-huh." [understanding and agreeing]

"The first thing I'd like you to do is just hold the cards for a while, while you think about the things that are uppermost in your mind and in your heart and in your life at the moment. You can take your time to do this - again, it's part of relaxing and not worrying about all these people around us. And then, if you would just put the cards down and then cut a pile off."

"What, so we've got two piles?"

"That's right, yes. Just put the cards down... and cut them for me."

" *[Performing the procedure] Like that?"*

"Okay, that's fine. [I laid out three banks of six cards each, for past present and future respectively. Initially only the first set were face up] And we'll take some of the cards here for the past, and then we'll do some in the middle which we'll turn over in a second, and then we'll have a look at Susie's future. I need one more - could you just cut again? That's fine. I'll just move these [the superfluous cards] out of the way.

Okay. So what we're going to try and do is first of all find a little bit about where you've been, so to speak, in the past and we could be looking back quite a way away. I'm quite happy with some of the cards that I see. There's no need to agree or disagree with anything."

"Uh-huh." [agreement and understanding]

"Obviously it's going to be more out of focus for me than it is for you..."

"Sure."

"... and some of the time, if we want to go into a particular theme, it certainly wouldn't hurt for you to let me know if there's something that contacts here.

Okay, the nice thing is we're getting The Magician and the King of Wands and the Nine of Wands [showing Susie some of the cards] and things like that, which are very much to do with someone who is driven by her own volition, not pushed around by other people.

Somebody who works hard for the things she gets in life. Somebody who plans ahead, who works things out, and who isn't just somebody who's pushed around or at the beck and call of other people. And I think that if you're honest, and if someone were to put this to you, that through your life you can say that you've encountered an awful lot of objections, and

barriers, and people saying no, and problems, but you can overcome them."

"Mmm, yeah."

"It's not that I think you fit some awful stereotype of being bossy and pushy, because I really don't think that's you, [light-hearted tone] although I'm sure we could probably round up two or three people who think you are!"

[laughter, nodding and agreement] "Yes, maybe some [would] agree with that!"

"But actually if were looking at the inner you, I don't think that is you. But you are somebody who has worked hard for the things that you have got. You're not somebody where things just fall into your lap."

[laughter and emphasis that this is certainly not the case] "No!"

"That's quite a ridiculous idea for you isn't it? We all know people who are like that - they're born with a silver spoon and everything just goes right for them. But I think you're more the sort of person who has... you've met the objections, and you've met the barriers and the blocks and the negatives, but you overcome."

"Right"

"The other thing... we're going to touch on quite a few different aspects of your life..."

"Yeah."

"... I think that there's a sign here that says that when you were quite young - and you may have go back quite some time - I'm picking up an impression from some of the cards I get, I could be wrong, but I think there was an accident when you were quite young. Your family and your parents and... do you have brothers and sisters...?"

"One of each."

"...one of each, I thought so, and they will have talked about this, and it happened when you were quite young. There was an accident, it was something there are no visible scars today but you took quite a knock at the time. Does this make sense for you?"

"Yes. I wouldn't quite call it an accident, but yes, when I was quite young."

"A mishap."

"A mishap, yes."

"Were you more... is it true to say... I'm getting the impression that your family, particularly your parents, were more concerned than they had need to be at the time because in the end it didn't turn out to be as serious as they thought."

'Yeah, possibly."

"Okay, so that's that. The nice thing about that is that some of the things we see here [the cards representing the past] I will also pick up impressions of here in the present."

"Okay."

"But that [the accident/mishap] is firmly behind you. It's definitely over your shoulder, so it's not one of these things that's a lingering influence."

"Yep."

"Let's come forward a little bit in time. There are some nice cards. We've got the Ace of Cups, we've got the Two of Cups. Cups are to do with possessions and Cups are to do with things that you own . There is, if I may say so - and I'm aware there are people watching this - there is a materialist side to you. If you're being honest..."

[laughs a little] 'Yep."

"... but I don't think you would say it's the most governing influence in you."

"No."

"And I guess we all know some people, they're admirable because they're not materialist at all and they seem quite happy and content in a dustbin. To be honest you're not like that."

"No."

"I think that earlier on in life, there's... [hesitating] you see, when we have some of these symbols here there's a contrast... there is a creative talent here."

"Yes."

"That's part of here [the past] and of here [the present]. I don't like to start making guesses 'cos it looks phoney..."

"Sure."

"...but let me tell you the impression I get."

"Okay."

"The impression I get is that when you were very young people knew you had quite a striking talent or ambition in one... I don't think - although you have an aesthetic sense and an

artistic sense -I don't think it's in that area. I think it could be more to do with very much the subject that our friends here [the TV producers] are concerned with, communication and words. But we'll come on to that in a second."

"Yeah." [understanding the process]

"Now I think this is a talent that you had the scope to develop. And I don't think this is something that's just been left in the past, but we'll come on to that later. But I think at the moment it would be true to say you haven't had the opportunity to develop this talent in the way that perhaps some people, your parents or friends or teachers thought you would at the time.

It's the sort of thing where people said 'Oh that's going to take Susie a long way; that's going to be...' but in fact that didn't happen. And at the moment it's not something that you're capitalising on. Does this make sense to you?"

"Yes."

"Okay. That's fine. I want to move on and sort of wind the clock forward a little bit and perhaps talk about teenage years and early relationships and this sort of thing. It's very difficult, but I like to try and do it because if it works it's fun for me and it's fun for you."

"Okay, yeah."

It's difficult to get impressions of letters, but I think that if you look back - there's nothing sort of flirtatious about this but - you had a few relationships in your teenage years...!" [light-hearted tone, suggesting significant numbers]

"Yes." [laughter]

"You know, it wasn't just sort of one off..."

"Right." [laughter]

"I think you can remember somebody er, [hesitation] I'm getting the sound of an 'M' or an 'N', it could be a 'Nick' or a 'Mick', one of those diminutives, meant something to you."

[Puzzled, little response]

"Will you think about that if it doesn't actually make sense for you right now?"

"Okay."

"This was somebody that you knew perhaps in connection with your education. It could be within the school area, a boyfriend, or somebody that you were close to - a good friend. It need not have been someone you were going out with. I get the impression that we're talking about that sort of sound, 'Nick' or 'Mick' or that could have just been a diminutive that they

used. Can you find somebody like that?"

"Not really, no..."

"That's not a problem..."

"I've got a brother called Michael but that's about as far..."

"...uh-huh? But were you quite close?"

"Reasonably."

"Reasonably close, more so... I mean, we all know families where sadly there's not really a lot of communication. It could be that's what I'm getting."

"Mmm." [agreement]

"I'll be honest with you, and be honest enough to admit it, I didn't think it was a family connection because I tend to work away from that, tend to look outwards..."

"Somewhere else, right..."

"...but just trying to pick up on what I'm getting and what's making sense to you, would it be fair to say that at the time I was trying to look at, which was..."

"Teenage years." [agreeing and following the reprise]

"...the teenage years, that relationship you had with your brother - where a lot of brothers and sisters just fight like cats and dogs all the time, all they have is arguments - it was a reasonably constructive relationship?"

"Mmm, yeah."

"So that could be what we're talking about?"

"That could be it, yeah."

"And his name is...?"

"Michael."

"Okay, so Michael's in there [indicating the past]. Was there another... I am trying to look beyond the family now... was there a relationship where distance was a problem?"

"Well, yes, in that I was away at school."

"Right, okay."

"So, *geographically bound..."*

"So there was that sort of geographical impediment to the wonderful flutterings of romance..."

[Nodding and plentiful agreement]

"That's another thing I see here, and I also think that relationship is behind you and it's past."

"Mm-um" [agreement].

"Okay. Let's come forward a little bit more. I think that when you first got your first proper job, I think there was some kind of... it wasn't a very orthodox procedure. I think there was a big fluke involved... a slice of luck."

"Yes, possibly." [Smiles]

"You say possibly, but I think it's making sense to you."

"Yes."

"Some people, they see the job advertised, they go for the interview, it's all very formal. I think there was some sort of marvellous fluke of luck that came your way."

"Mm-um" [mild agreement].

"This means something to you."

"Mm-um [mild agreement]."

"Okay. It's not really contravening the sort of thing I spoke about earlier, where you're somebody who works hard for the things you get. But nonetheless..."

"Lucky, yes."

"Once or twice we all get dealt a good card, and there are elements here of skill but also of luck and fortune, particularly with regard to career. I spoke about an accident earlier... I don't see any major health worries that we can talk about in your child and teenage years."

'Wo."

"There wasn't anything like that."

'Wo." *[shaking head]*

"You've always enjoyed pretty good health and strength."

"Mm-um." [agreement].

"Okay, that's fine.

I want to move on, because I'm aware that the [TV production] people want me to talk about the present and the future a little bit. But just more recently, and this is quite a fun one as well..."

"7s *it?"[Smiling / laughter]*

"There are influences here, I'm talking about what we might call the festive season, Christmas and New Year, that sort of thing, there was some kind of... you haven't forgotten this and

I think it's the sort of thing you probably talk to people about over a drink or over coffee. There was some kind of, er, something going wrong; some kind of 'Oh my God, why does this happen to me'. It could have been getting your dress snagged just as you were about to go out, or an appointment falling through or going to the wrong door..."

"Mmm..." [puzzled, cautious, only mild agreement]

"This is to do with a party or it could be around the festive season, Christmas, New Year, although that's just my first impression as to where people do their socialising. And I think it could be the end of last year, where there was some sort of social occasion where you were planning to meet, and there was some kind of terrible mess-up."

"Nothing terrible I can remember."

"No, okay, was there... is it just that I'm exaggerating too much. There was a sort of minor hiccup."

"Minor hiccup, I think."

"So it's not really as writ large as I was saying."

Wo. *I'm sorry!"*

"Don't worry...! So, and was that to do with... and was it around the Christmas and New Year period though?"

"Yes. November-ish."

"Novemberish, okay, and that was something that directly affected you and also..."

"Well, yes, it was something that was easily resolved but I felt a bit stupid at the time."

"Well, easily resolved for you..."

[Laughter and agreement]

"...but a lot of people could have been knocked sideways by it!

So let's just look back at that [referring to the reading so far]. There were some things that seemed to make sense there about your past life, and we found Michael in there. Maybe Michael will turn up again [gesture to the 'present' section of the layout]. Do you still see much of him? Because I feel distance there..."

"Yes, there is a distance and I haven't seen him since Christmas."

"Okay let's see what you're like now. This is usually the bit that people find [more interesting]. This is where you've been and this is where you are."

"And this is where we're going... yeah."

[assessing the cards] "Oh, well, I don't know if I want to sit here any more!" [light-hearted]

[laughs]

"Okay. No health problems, that's the first thing."

"No."

"You're quite a resilient, tough old boot, basically, if you don't mind me saying so. Let's talk about the fact that you're somebody who is educated but you'll never stop learning."

"Mm-um." [agreement].

"You are somebody who is decisive and determined."

"Uh-huh." [agreement].

"There is actually a side of you which you keep very, very dark and nobody sees, and that is you can be hurt quite easily."

"Uh-huh." [agreement].

"And people don't realise this because they think you are quite strong on the outside, but between you and me and the cards, you actually are very sensitive. There are times over the past five or six years when you've been so hurt by things that people have done that they've actually changed your outlook."

"Mm-um, probably..." [unsure]

"Okay, you say probably. I mean, I don't know, I'm not trying to be right or wrong. I'm just telling you the impressions I get. I have to comment here on a professional connection. I'm getting the impression of rendering a service to people that people enjoy, and of finance."

"Yes."

"Yes? Okay, I'm getting the impression that you handle numbers. You're numerate, and I don't think you have to do with stocks and shares 'cos I don't think you're a gambler."

"Well, no."

"Okay, what I do get the impression of is that you have a professional image that you're working with people's finances... is this the right sort of area?"

"Yes."

"Okay, would it be right to say that you help them do something they can't do as well for themselves?"

"Yep."

"Okay, that's the sort of area that I see you working in."

[nodding and agreement]

"Okay. I don't believe you are married."

"Okay, no."

"No children."

Wo."

"But one day you'd like to have children."

"Mmm... iffy!" [laughter]

"Iffy? Okay, it's not been decided. I think the concentration at the moment is very much on the career. Would it be right to say there's a possibility of yourself, deep down, wondering if the present job you're in is the right one for you?"

"Er, yeah." [surprised reaction]

"I think there is a connection here, a question in mind as to whether you might actually try your hand at something else or make a living at something else."

"Mm-um." [very positive agreement]

"And that's to do with the creative ability which we saw over here."

"Yes."

"We've got The Popess here, let me just talk about this [showing the card]. The Popess is a maternal figure, a feminine figure. She is a figure of the female strengths of perseverance and dedication and care and looking after the things that matter to you most. And I believe that there is a kind of protective custody around this creative ability that you have, which could be something like writing, but also could involve your sense of humour, your sense of creativity, your sense of fun. Is this something that you nurture, that you look after in yourself?"

"Yes."

"You'd agree with that?"

"Uh-huh." [agreement]

"Okay, and I think there's also..., your creativity is reactive as well as active. You have a responsiveness, you like music for example."

"Mm-um." [agreement]

"Your music collection is pretty good."

"Mm-um." [agreement].

"And you enjoy it and it's something that gives you quite a great deal of satisfaction."

"Mm-um." [agreement].

"You're quite an outgoing person. I think anyone can see that - they don't need to look at the cards."

[Laughter]

"But at the same time, would it be right [to say] you do a fair amount of the 'on the town' stuff?"

'Yeah."

"Clubs and this sort of thing?"

'Yeah, yeah."

"Maybe sometimes too much?" [light-hearted]

'You'll have to speak to my boss, but yes." [laughter]

"Okay. But he's not here so I have to ask you!" [shared laughter]

'Yep,yep."

"And you're aware of that, and I'm sure it doesn't get too much out of hand. There is a career option, not something that has been forced upon you. I don't think anybody has walked into your office recently and said you're going to be fired. What I think it is, is I think that there is a creative aspect of you that isn't being fully sated at the moment in the job you do."

"Uh-huh." [agreement].

"Because the job you do is to do with numbers and finance and that sort of thing, is that right?"

"Yes."

"Okay, and I think there's an option open to you where you might be thinking well, I have a creative ability, I could try my hand. I don't think it's the visual arts it could be something like writing."

"Mmm." [agreement]

"And you could be thinking, well now, is that an option for me?"

'7s *it viable?"*

"Viable, yeah, okay, so there's something there that makes sense to you?"

"Uh-huh." [agreement].

"The other thing that I can see about you at the moment is that that's going to weigh very heavily on your mind. You are... you're going to laugh when I say this I'm sure..."

"Goon!"

"... you're not someone who is scrabbling around for money. You are comfortable."

"Yeah, I manage."

"You manage, and again part of that is something you would take credit for. It doesn't just happen."

"Yeah."

"Some people are careful with money and some people aren't. You are careful. You can be cautious. Your extrovertism doesn't actually manifest itself in the way that some sort of superficial reading might indicate. I don't think you're the sort who puts on a red nose and starts entertaining everyone at the drop of a hat."

"No, no."

"But nonetheless you're not going to be scared to give your opinion. You're not going to wait around just being the wallflower whilst everyone else tells the funny stories and anecdotes. You have a fair grasp of things, of life, geography and history. You can talk about various subjects, not just related to what you do for a living."

"Yeah."

"You have outside interests. You can talk about creative things, and writing, and music and this sort of thing."

"Mm-um." [plentiful agreement]

"You also have an interest in history?"

"Mmm... yes." [partial agreement]

"A mild one..."

"A mild one."

"... okay, but this again is nothing to do professionally. I think again at the moment there's something here about relationships. I think there's an option very close to you..."

"Mmm..." [partial agreement]

"...or in the very near future, where you have an option to say, well, something that's happening for you at the moment could take on a more permanent basis."

"Possibly, mmm."

"Yeah?"

"Okay."

"Okay. I mean, that's there, and we might have a look over here [the future] at what happens about that."

"Okay."

"And the other thing is that the kind of protectiveness that you've built around yourself over the years is going to be something which perhaps now and again, at the moment - and I say this just because I see it and I don't mean it too personally - it's something that you're going to have to shed a little bit of."

"Right."

"Because you could come across to people as a little bit too armour-plated, a little bit too cold. Is this something you recognise in yourself?"

"Yes."

"It is. Okay, well I see it here. When we get this many swords and things, it's very difficult to avoid it [picking up card]. King of Swords. And it might be quite nice if you were able to emphasise more of the feminine..."

"Girly?"

"Well, that's a slightly derogatory term, there are positive feminine attributes, or which are traditionally regarded as feminine traits! And I think you're also someone who is aware of politics but doesn't dwell on them too much."

"Yes."

"Because there's a lot of sense in you that politics is all the same and you always know what they're going to say so you can't really care much either way. Er, I'm just seeing correspondence of a financial nature which is going to affect..."

"What do you mean by correspondence?"

"Well, for example you could have recently been in touch with someone pursuing this option of whether your more creative side is viable or not."

'Yes."

"You've had a letter or some communication suggesting some input in that way."

"Yeah."

"That's one of the more recent things I see, but it's going on in the present."

[Enthusiastic agreement]

"Okay, let's go over here [future]. I'm just going to turn over three, and then there's going to be three... what I'd like you to do is just nominate one of the last three. It's not a card trick or anything..."

"Pigeons won't fly out or anything? ...that one there."
[Laughter]

"Okay that's the one we'll leave 'til last, because that's the decision card. Now then... Ace of Coins. Very good for financial..."

"Ohgood!"

"...okay, let's just say that I don't think the next time Fortune compile their top 100 millionaires and millionairesses you're going to be on the list. But let's just say that the kind of financial good sense and management which is part of your life, and which you've shown all through your life... and which is something of a family trend, am I right?"

"Mm... yes." [Only partial agreement]

"Yeah OK. Grudgingly... that's fine."

[laughter]

"We can be wrong as well as right! This is going to develop and you'll have even more satisfaction in that regard. I don't really see you sitting under Waterloo in a cardboard box okay? *[Note: this used to be a London euphemism for being homeless]* So we've got coins. I think there is an option here definitely to... Page of Wands, Three of Wands... to take your own life in the direction that you want to."

"Right."

"I think there is an ability here to perhaps, er you may decide that the next big novel's going to have your name on it. Or something you've written for TV is going to have your name on it or something like this. There is a creative urge here which is going to come to fruition, I know that..."

"Successfully ?"

"Well one of the things that the tarot refuses to do is deal in absolutes."

"Okay."

"Your version of success won't be the same as the next person's idea of success, so what do we consider successful?"

"Yeah..." [nodding in agreement]

"To some people it's just measured in pound signs, to some people ... even if nobody ever sees what they've written..."

"Sure, that they've actually done it..."

"...that they've done it, and to some people all you need is to show it one person and if that person enjoys it, well one person's enjoyed it."

"Right."

"So that's the kind of success. What I can see is that we have an ability here to take even more control of your own life than you already do. When we have this, the last of the arcana cards, 21, The World, it tends to pertain to somebody who, as it were, creates her own dominion."

"Mm-um." [taking an interest in the card's meaning]

"And I think that you know that in the future one of the things you're going to do is, er, you will have even more things in your own life sorted out. You will be living where you want to live. You will have around you the things and the people that you want to have around you. I don't see you ending up in the sort of blind alley that, sadly..."

"*... some people do."*

"...some people do, let's admit it. And I think, there's the sort of people you have a coffee with them and all they do is moan about how everything's wrong in their lives. This isn't Susie. This isn't you."

"Right."

"Now, as I say, I think health is always going to be good for you, no matter how often you come and see me or somebody else..."

'Yep."

"...I don't think we're going to be talking about horrible things happening."

"Uh-huh." [agreeing this is unlikely]

"Although there could be throat area problems that might have afflicted you in the past. You know, you could be one of the first people who goes down with a sore throat when the bug's going round."

"Yeah."

"I don't know if that means anything to you... but it's that mild sort of thing."

"Right." [disinterested, but not disagreeing]

"Romance-wise... I see a lot more for you than perhaps you see for yourself."

"Oh, right! Okay!"

"There is a scope here to apply the same kind of determination and decision-making..."

"Yeah."

"...to somebody and say, you know, he might not know it at all but there's going to be a very productive partnership here."

"Right."

"More than just a business relationship, okay. And that will probably be somebody that you meet with regard to this creative side of your life and impulses."

"Right."

"Okay, you have actually asked me one direct question, which is about the success of your creativity. [Consulting the last card] Ah, this is where it would have been nice, for the sake of everything here, if I could have come up with some nice big resolution. We have the Six of Wands so let me talk about this card. What I can tell you is this, you're going to have to judge on your own terms what success means. I think perhaps it could be that you don't perhaps write the next John Le Carre, six is so sort of in the middle, you know the values."

"Average."

"Well, average in some ways. You see wands are to do with people who use their own creativity and their own power and their own ability to do things. What I suppose the tarot is suggesting here is that Susie is going to go ahead and do what she wants to do, and that in itself is going to give you a great deal of satisfaction. But if you're going to go into it just for the money, forget it."

'Yep."

"There has to be another motivation, there has to be something deeper to you, and I think you realise this yourself in your own core."

"Yes." [nodding].

"And that will be how you regard your own success. Hey, I mean if cheques start coming through the door, great!"

"Fine."

"If they don't, well you're not going to say, well that was the only way I was going to accept it. And I think that's the sort of answer that we're getting."

"Right."

"And we've had a look at where you've been, and where you are, and where you're going. And unless there's anything specific we want to go into, I'm quite happy to say I've done my best for you, and I hope that some of it made sense for you."

"Okay, lovely, thank you."

"And I think they want you to go and have a talk with somebody."

"Thank you and bye bye."

This concluded the reading. At the time, I had no idea what Susie made of it all, or what she would say. For all I knew, she could have been ready to loudly denounce me as an obvious fake.

What the client said

After the reading, Susie was interviewed by the show's presenter, Sandi Toksvig.

Sandi: "Ian was wary because of all the lights and so on, it's not how he would normally do it. So was it all right?"

Susie: *"It was fine. You know, not quite as scary as, you know, some people imagine or portray them to be. Yes, it was fine."*

"So what sort of things were in the reading?"

"It went from past, present, future... I suppose one thing that went throughout was you're going to be reasonably solvent and reasonably healthy, which is fine, quite pleasant; that yes, maybe there's a creative bent, talent if you like, that hasn't been fulfilled and, you know, should you maybe jump to the other side and say 'bugger it, I'm going to do it' and worry about whatever else happens. But yes, it was reasonably happy, nice number of friends, quite outgoing. I mean there wasn't anything ominous - whether he'd been asked not to say anything unpleasant I don't know."

"I mean, were you surprised about how much he was able to gain about you?"

"Yes, it was not terribly... I mean there were quite a lot of specifics there, you know it's not like saying every Capricorn is this or whatever, yes I was."

"What were the specifics that particularly surprised you?"

"Well, I think the creative side, which people wouldn't necessarily know. I think maybe the solvency side, the connection with being quite close to my brother, that sort of thing."

"So over all, did you feel it was basically a good..."

"Yes, I mean I've never had one before so, you know, I've got nothing to compare it with. But I was reasonably impressed."

"I want to be absolutely clear, Susie, that until the reading you had never met Ian Rowland."

"I'd never met him, I'd never done any of this before."

"All right, now he come up with some fairly specific things - the name of your brother, the fact that you had an accident when you were young, the Christmas incident. Did that sort of give you a start, that he was able to do that?"

"Yes, it did. I think the brother, and the Christmas thing, yes. You know I came to it with an open mind, and you always think maybe these things are set up. But no, I'd never met him before. But yes, I mean it was quite surprising, because obviously he only chose two names and it was one of those."

"And were you trying, as it were, not to give anything away about yourself?"

"Well yes, I mean I answered questions. I didn't, you know, say anything."

"So what was your over all feeling about it?"

"I was quite impressed. In some ways now you've done it once you think, gosh, maybe there are people out there who know things about you that you may or may not want them to. But yes, I felt reasonably calm and happy about it."

"But surprised?"

'Yes, pleasantly."

In a separate part of the show, Susie was asked if she thought it possible I might have been some sort of fake or fraud. She said she did not think this was possible.

Afterword

This demonstration was one of the first I ever gave for TV. I do not regard it as a particularly strong example of cold reading in action. It is clear that I made a number of significant mistakes, such as ignoring what I earlier called the Cream Principle, i.e. make weak statements first, and strengthen them if appropriate. There were too many occasions when I offered a strong statement first, and then had to try and dilute it to fit.

Susie was also a little more astute than many typical clients. As her interview made clear, she realised that I had asked quite a lot

of questions - most clients remain relatively unaware of this if the questioning is done well. However, Susie also claimed, rather confusingly, that she had given me very little information. In fact, she had given me ample feedback throughout, both verbal and non-verbal.

I am not trying to suggest this particular demonstration was a spectacular triumph. Nonetheless, Susie *did* come away feeling that I was genuine, and that there was something to tarot reading after all. She was genuinely impressed by what she viewed as my ability to identify specific details about her life, including things which even her friends did not know about.

The reading lasted $24^{1}/_{2}$ minutes. In this time, I talked to Susie about:

- her personality, temperament, character, skills and talents
- incidents and relationships in her distant past
- incidents in the more recent past, and the present
- a current relationship
- her family, including the name of her brother
- her creative writing ability (which her friends did not know about)
- her career
- her hobbies and interests,
- her aspirations and ambitions, both personal and professional
- her feelings about herself, her career and her choices
- her finances
- her social life and social skills

These topics were covered with more or less total agreement the whole way. There were some times when Susie only partially agreed with my statements, but there was not a single occasion when she declared me to be wrong. This is not bad for nearly 25 minutes talking to a complete stranger!

Example 2: prepared astrological reading

Introduction

This second example is taken from a documentary series called "Heart of the Matter", made by Roger Bolton Productions for BBC Television. For this demonstration, I was asked to pose as an astrologer and to give the *same* astrological reading to two completely *different* clients. I agreed to prepare the reading in advance, and then to present it to the two clients in turn.

The story of this particular reading is quite interesting. I was quite busy with other projects at the time, and as I result I left my preparation to the last minute. At around midnight on the eve of the demonstration, I sat down at my word-processor and simply made up a reading which I felt sounded suitably astrological. I wrote it in more or less one go, with very little revision. By the time I had finished, I'd written about 3900 words.

I was not told the clients' dates of birth or anything else about them. All I was told was that one was Virgo, the other Taurus. When I wrote the reading, I referred to Virgo throughout. I then used the word-processor to prepare a second version, in which every reference to 'Virgo' was taken out and the word 'Taurus' substituted in its place. Otherwise, the two versions were identical.

To the best of my knowledge, not a single word of the reading bore any relation to genuine astrological theory or practice. I made up phrases like 'Sign of Virgo with Saturn rising' without the faintest idea what this is supposed to mean, or whether it actually applied to either client's horoscope. I merely wanted to add some astrological jargon to my made-up reading.

I also got some blank astrological charts, as used by astrologers, and drew interesting geometrical shapes, squiggles and signs on them as if these meant something.

The next afternoon, the taping went ahead as planned in a comfortable flat belonging to one of the production crew. I met the clients one at a time, and took them through the prepared reading. While it was possible for me to emphasise some sections of the reading more than others, the rules meant that I was not allowed to make any changes to either version, and both women were presented with the complete reading in its entirety.

I will have more to say about this reading in the 'Afterword'.

The clients

The first client (Virgo) was a very likeable, gently-spoken woman, in her late forties or early fifties, with a trace of a South African accent. She was pleasantly plump rather than athletic, and dressed for comfort rather than style. After the reading, it later transpired that she was married, and had a modest interest in astrology.

The second client (Taurus) was a rather more confident young woman in her early twenties, and English. She was extremely slim and athletic, and her looks, make-up and stylish outfit made it clear she took great care over her appearance. Though polite and good-natured, she was clearly more noncommittal than the first. After I had completed the reading, it turned out that she was single, although in a long-term relationship, and was mildly sceptical about astrology.

I think you will agree these were very dissimilar women. All the more interesting, then, to see how they would react to the same identical reading.

The reading

Here is the Virgo version of the reading. The second was identical, but with the word 'Virgo changed to 'Taurus' throughout.

Zodiac summary:

Sign of Virgo with Saturn rising

Principal planets:

First house: Venus, Neptune. Fifth house: Mars. Sixth house: Pluto.

Principal aspects:

Venus in Aquarius. Neptune and Mars in Pisces. Pluto in Sagittarius.

The Virgo female

- affairs of the heart

The Virgo female is feminine, warm and loving, no stranger to strong passions and deep feelings. She is not as easily hurt as

some, like her frailer friends Pisces or Gemini for example, but this resilience has a drawback. Since you are accustomed to feeling strong, and can take on the chin some knocks that would send others down for the count, you react all the more intensely when, as must sometimes happen, someone does manage to hurt or wound you. When this happens, you are stunned, amazed that your defences failed you. Moreover, you can be very effective at making your distress known to all around you.

You genuinely find it hard to give up your independence, indeed your every instinct challenges this very notion - why should you? You prefer to strike a well-managed balance between solo activities and those in tandem with your partner, to the benefit of both.

You do not bear grudges much - it's too time-consuming for you, and you prefer to simply move on and leave small nuisances behind. Those who cross you or treat you ill will most likely receive a sharp blast of icy contempt - one of your strong suits when the mood strikes - and then be left watching your heels through dust.

You can take a knock to your own pride or confidence, because you trust yourself to recover. But woe betide anyone who hurts or damages those whom you care for. You are a protector and a carer. You never, ever forget an enemy whom you perceive to have injured someone close to you. Nor do you forgive yourself for having allowed your protective skills to have been thwarted. Incidentally, one such victory is all that any opponent can hope for. Should there ever be a return match, the female Virgo will prove herself a most fearsome adversary: well-prepared, serenely defiant, and, when joining for battle, resolutely invincible. Those who on the first occasion manage a successful attack would be wise upon a second meeting to reach for a white flag of surrender. Virgos do not take prisoners.

- *career and self-advancement*

The Virgo female can acquit herself well in most departments. She can be a great cook, a great businesswoman, a great artist or a great mother. Creativity is a strong point, and is likely to manifest itself in more than one form. She can write the great novel, or create a prize-winning garden. She can think and express herself visually, or learn to be a good dancer. Then again, her creativity can express itself in more subtle ways - in the way she talks, in the way she conducts her friendships and relationships, in her choice of gifts and presents, or in her ideas

for holidays and other special occasions.

There are two problems that disturb this somewhat calm picture. First, you have a degree of inertia that may prevent you from exploring all the options before deciding which creative mode is right for you. This inertia is not physical or geographical - you may be a great traveller or the sort to move every two years. It is an inner inertia whereby you so enjoy the outlet you have discovered already that you overlook the possibility of there being something even better just around the corner.

The other problem is that you do not lack energy. Even if you are not inclined to be particularly athletic, you nonetheless find yourself possessed of enormous reserves of both creative and physical stamina. From this point of view, you may find it hard to find a role that can soak up all your capacity, and genuinely cater for your potential. This places you at a disadvantage compared to the more easily contented Aquarius, for example, or the less ambitious Libra. On the positive side, once you do find the right role, you can be relied upon to make the most of it, and leave the other contenders behind. A Virgo who has found something to excel at is a joy to herself and to others - always provided, of course, that they are not so foolish as to try and stand in her way.

The story of the major houses

- first house

Your first house is associated with affairs closest to the heart and to romance. Here, the influence of Venus, the guider of passion, is a very positive sign that you can succeed in love where many fail, although this is not to say you won't need some of your Virgo toughness, persistence and self-confidence from time to time.

The presence in this first house of Neptune, associated with deep-seated wisdom and a tempered approach to life's turbulence, augurs well for you. Though your life may pass through many phases, and love present its thorns as well as its roses, you have enough deep-seated faith in yourself to see you through and achieve the happiness and love which is your birthright, and for which you have more than average capacity.

- fifth house

Your fifth house is associated with career, self-advancement and personal wealth, although the stars do not see wealth in purely financial terms. The presence of Mars, the planet of energy, power and conquest, allied to your natural Virgo strength and

fortitude, indicates that you have an enviable capacity to work hard for what you want, and to overcome any obstacle which might defeat a less determined character.

However, you can only bring these formidable strengths to bear once you have truly committed yourself to a chosen line or path, and this is where you may come unstuck. Your innate tendency is to stick to the tried and true, to stay comfortable where you are, and to settle for what you've got. In other words, your ability to forge ahead, determine new horizons and achieve any or all ambitions, may go untapped as you decide to take the easier, quieter life. It would be a shame to squander this power and potential for conquering new challenges.

- sixth house

Your sixth house is associated with learning, intellect and communication. Your primary influence here is Pluto, the planet of peace, contemplation and solitude. This would suggest someone who is never ending in her search for new understandings, new perspectives and new ways of seeing the world. You are already aware of how much you have learned in life, and of the things now clear which once frustrated and puzzled you. You are, as it were, a voyager and a traveller, who has gained much in experience and who has learned to trust to this experience when a challenge presents itself, or life takes a turn for the worse.

Virgos do not generally aspire to abstract intellectual goals which may have little pragmatic value. They enjoy learning, so long as they see a tangible benefit and a practical improvement in their quality of life. Pluto will moderate your natural tendency to confront problems and puzzles head on, and encourage you to adopt more creative, and more subtle strategies - to outwit the problem, instead of charging at it. This makes for a very effective combination, and you should be a good learner and thinker - someone whom friends know can usually be relied upon to solve a problem using either sheer will and determination, or a smart-ish piece of lateral thinking that others would have missed.

Who you are - your zodiac traits

- the communicator

You are a communicator. In the past five years you have discovered fresh talents in this direction, happy to share with others the benefit of your knowledge and experience. You are not some chattering busy-body - the advice you give, and the

suggestions you make, are always firmly grounded in reality and 100% practical. You can think through the practicalities of any situation, and rarely let small problems get in your way. Your friends see you as helpful, a good ally in a tight corner, and welcome your strength.

If there is a drawback here, it is that now and again you don't really know when to stop. Inwardly, you know that others have to lead their own lives, but you can't help feeling you have enough imagination for two - as indeed you do - and are plagued by nagging suspicions that if only they would just leave everything up to you, you would get further, faster, and with less fuss.

- *the achiever*

The flustered, hysterical approach is totally alien to you. Calm, methodical, planned - these are your hallmarks. Only the most serious frustrations, arising from almost unbelievable bad luck and particularly pernicious circumstance, can unsettle you and at such times all around would be well-advised to steer clear. A female Virgo sensing that she has lost control is not an attractive sight, and needs extremely careful handling. She will calm down when she's good and ready, and when she does there will be a full-throttle display of short, sharp action designed to put her house back in order and to restore the sense of security which is so precious to her. Again, it would be most unwise for anyone to try and intervene or obstruct this process.

- *the participant*

You are a doer, not a fantasist; a performer not a critic; a participant rather than an observer. Quiet contemplation, despite the influence of the lofty Pluto, is not your scene. Get involved, get with it, get in on the action - this is you. The pity of it is that on occasions you go too far - you want to run the whole show, overlooking that others also want to make their contribution. However, provided you manage to check this tendency, which in any case is less of a problem as the years go by, you are a valued team player and one with enormous heart.

Your deep-rooted pride will simply not allow you to let the side down. Whatever role you accept, you always play it to the full. This is not just admirable selflessness on your part: your powerful sense of independence is ever with you, and underneath whatever mask you may wear, you want your share of the limelight, your share of the praise. But if you rather obviously crave some of the rewards, at least you are prepared to work

hard to obtain them, and others can see this in you.

- *the schemer*

If you were to be totally candid, you would have to admit that although your first choice is to win fair and square, you are not beyond stretching an ethical point in your favour in exceptional circumstances. If you sense the game is a little bit rigged against your interests, and the fair approach simply won't work, then you can quickly decide that the ends justify the means, and to take whatever route you have to in order to win. You are honest, and even your worst enemy could not say you aren't, but you're not a saint and frankly you've never felt fluttering wings and a harp were really your style.

Trends of the recent past and present

- *romance*

The past five years have seen at least one major romantic line that became a tangled knot, and ultimately left you somewhat cynical in your outlook. You recovered - as you always do - but not by chirpily "bouncing back" and pretending all is well, for this is not your style, but by carefully assessing what you had learned from the experience, and promising yourself that you will be more circumspect in the future. Problems could arise if you have now gone too far the other way and are too cautious in forming new friendships, associations and relationships.

Always remember that Venus is one of your first house planets, and her strong romantic influences are not easily subdued, nor should they be. You can be a terrific lover - understanding, fiercely loyal, playful, committed, able to think for two and, when the needs arise, be the one who provides the strength and the determination that can see both you and your partner through difficult times. Nor is it hard for you to receive love - you frankly relish attention and affection, and are willing to earn both in abundance. Your relationships would never fail for want of stability or of effort - you have both in spades.

Where you are vulnerable is in being perhaps too strong for some partners - who find your boundless inner fortitude and spirit rather too much to handle - and, on occasion, opting for personal comfort and contentment rather than the challenge of a new relationship, or a new phase in an existing one. In this regard, you do sometimes show the lack of influence from dynamic Mercury or Saturn, the great promoter of initiative and planning.

- learning and new experience

Over the past five years, you have exercised your tremendous capacity for new learning, and for acquiring what one could describe in the broadest sense as new wisdom. There is a conflict here. The planetary aspect of Pluto would incline you towards wisdom for its own sake and knowledge for itself, like a scholar in an ivory tower. Yet as a Virgo, you feel inclined to make the effort to learn only when you can see a practical, material benefit at the end.

This inner conflict has manifested itself over the past five years. On the one hand, with Pluto's influence, you are the dabbler, readily dipping into everything under the sun, something of an intellectual scavenger. You don't care where you find information - books, pictures, conversation - or how it might help you in your goals. You value it for its own sake, and tell yourself you never know when it might come in handy. You make a great conversationalist, provided you find someone of similar temperament.

On the other hand, being Virgo, you find yourself inclined to harbour your resources to the full, and not waste any precious time or energy in pursuit of new learning if you can't see the point, the practical benefit. This is a conflict you will find hard to resolve, and yet resolve it you must if you are to realise your potential. The Martian aspect of your fifth house suggests that your Virgo side will win the day. You will become better at focusing your reserves on one or two carefully chosen goals, and then working towards them with your characteristic determination and resourcefulness. This process may already have begun, but it is almost certainly not yet complete.

It would be unfortunate for anyone to try and stand in between you and your chosen goal. They will not find it at all a comfortable place to be. If they are wise, they will stand aside, or perhaps help you and ally themselves to your formidable strength. If they are not so wise, they may try to oppose you or divert you from your chosen course. Their chances of success are slim. The sheer strength of your Virgo nature, welded to the strong presence of the warrior Mars, is a powerful combination and not one to be tackled lightly. An opponent's only real hope is that you will give up, or simply cease to apply yourself to your goal. This sometime happens when Virgos find themselves in a nice spot some part way along their journey, and opt for a bask in the sunshine rather than making further progress.

- *money; and finance*

Your chart does not suggest that you lack for the material pleasures that mean the most to you. You have financial concerns, and it is probably correct to say that some financial stress will always be with you. You are neither governed by money nor a slave to it. The truth is that despite your admitted materialistic streak, you simply do not consider money important enough for your life to revolve around its management and accumulation. Pluto, in your sixth house, would never allow you to get so interested in such mundane affairs. Hence over the past five years you have managed to make a little money grow, but you have also witnessed your ability to wave goodbye to it, enjoy the proceeds and let tomorrow take care of itself.

As a Virgo, your principal concern is for the comforts of the present, and the needs of the now. You are not unconcerned about the future, but it definitely takes a distant second place in your heart to the pleasures and satisfactions that you can enjoy now. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" could almost be your motto. In this regard, you will always be at loggerheads with Cancer - the typical long-distance planner if ever there was one - and Capricorn, whose endless fastidious attention to tiny details would leave you cold.

- *health*

There are no major oppositions in your chart which would indicate serious health problems or risks in adult life, although when you were younger, before your had matured into your natural strength and resilience, there may have been more than one serious cause for worry. For now, you are careful enough to take care of yourself where and when it matters.

Many Virgos do make fine athletes, but they tend to do so by dogged persistence and determined training, allied to a fierce drive to be first, rather than natural athletic grace or gifted reflexes. Hence you are unlikely to be known as the fitness freak among your circle, and not one to revolve your life around the local gymnasium. If these activities interest you at all, it is purely as a pragmatic means to an end - to feel better about yourself, to please yourself or your partner, or to prove something to yourself.

The strong influence of Mars in your fifth house suggests that whatever routine health problems you face you will see through with characteristic resilience and inner steel. You are not the sort to buckle easily under life's stresses and strains. Hypochondria is

not to your taste. Whenever life fights you, you fight back, and you win far more often than you lose.

Trends for the future

Mars moving into Pisces this year. Sagittarius moving into your fifth house this year. Pluto gaining ascendance from next Spring. Mars waning from the following Winter.

- *success and ambition*

Your are not one to trust to fate, to sit back and see how things turn out. You rightly feel yourself to be the architect of your own future, and you have a healthy sense of responsibility for your own actions.

The good things in life are yours for the taking. Not without effort. Not without challenge. Not without hardship. But you must not let these factors deter you. Remember, you have more than enough skills and talents at your disposal to see yourself through, and when all else fails your sheer force of will is going to see you through. You are a realist, and you know that everything in life comes at a price. Keep your realistic outlook, and you will not go far wrong.

Those ambitions closest to your heart now are ones that you have harboured over the past 18 months at least (ever since Neptune's ascendance in your first house became the dominant conjunction). If you can marshal your reserves correctly, and reign the occasional flashes of temper that can cost so dear, then you will see your goals achieved.

Despite your occasional daydream of celebrity and exalted attention - all Virgos crave a touch of the "star for a day" treatment - great fame and fortune is not indicated and wouldn't suit you anyway. What is indicated is something altogether more satisfying. You will reap the benefits of your more methodical, well-paced progress through life. While some of your contemporaries, the early meteors who blazed a brighter trail, are seen to burn out, you will be coming into your prime and enjoying the treasures you have patiently laid up for yourself.

You will never lose your taste for comfort, and luckily for you the experience of luxury will become more frequent with the passing of time.

- *love*

Few Virgos are ever truly unhappy in love. Even during spells of relative solitude, they can find contentment and much to enjoy in life. You path is one favourable to strong and lasting love. Yes, you will continue to be too cautious and careful where romance is concerned. Yes, you will continue to squander some of the affection and warmth that could be yours by being a little too strong, and perhaps stubborn, for some people. But in spite of all, you have such warmth to offer, and make such a steadfast, supportive partner, that you can hardly fail to enjoy the well-founded relationships that are your birthright.

Attachments at their strongest now will remain so for the next year at least, although the passionate influence of Mars is due to wane a little from next year onwards. New attachments are indicated whether you want them or not, but yours will be the controlling hand that decides exactly how close a new presence is allowed to get. You are not to be trifled with, and people do not take long to realise this about you. Problems will only arise if you start to shirk this power, to worry about exploiting your formidable strength of character. With both Venus and Mars as powerful influences at birth, albeit in different houses, you cannot contentedly be one of life's shrinking violets. Yours is the active, determining role. A relationship YOU want to happen WILL happen. A relationship YOU want to be stronger WILL be stronger.

Know that this is so, and enjoy the consequences! Yours is one of the most sensual signs of all, and few can extract more enduring happiness, romance, passion and companionship from a well-founded relationship than the Virgo female.

- *health*

In general, good news. You have many untroubled years ahead when your faculties, both physical and mental, will serve you well in pursuit of your ambitions. You are naturally disposed to take an interest in your health, and are rarely if ever inclined to be reckless in health matters or to take unnecessary risks.

Keep your sense of prudence where health is concerned - it has served you well so far, and will continue to do so.

There is only one warning sign. You cannot realistically expect to always enjoy the same strength, and the same stamina, as you do now. Taking the long-term view, the danger lies in not accepting this natural process of gradation and change, and finding yourself one day imposing too great a strain on yourself through failing to

acknowledge the passing of the years. Beware your innate obstinacy and pride in these matters. There is no shame in making suitable adjustments to your life to reflect each change in station.

This is a long-term concern. You are in no way past your peak, and have many years ahead when you can still enjoy your natural vigour. But when the time comes to ease off a little, do not resist or resent this process.

This concludes the text of my prepared pseudo-astrological reading. Remember, this exact same reading was given to both clients - the only difference was that in the second version I replaced 'Virgo' with 'Taurus' all the way through.

What the clients said

After each reading, the client was interviewed by the show's presenter, Joan Bakewell. The first client's interview was as follows.

Joan: "Okay, well Bridget, you've had your reading, your horoscope. How do you react to it? What do you make of it?"

Bridget *(Virgo): "On reflection I suppose I have to think a lot of it, take the bits which he read me which I... and put them to use as to how I want to do them. It was more involved a reading to what I've perhaps had before, in that I expected him to say 'you should be a writer, you have a domineering personality'. Whereas he didn't. He intimated what he thought I was rather than saying exactly... which is better in a way 'cos it doesn't... mind you, as he did point out at one point that you go off and become that person or that thing, because that's what you've been told."*

"But did he get you right?"

'Yes I would say 99.9% of it was right. Mind you, I thought he would bring in other bits which are renowned Virgos, but then again I suppose that's the newspaper tabloid part of a Virgo, you know, the regular star magazine."

"So what did he get right about you?"

"He said that I'm precise and that once I start something I go at it. He said something about a romantic intimation that I had changed in the last five years or something. I need to read that a bit more deeply. But I think obviously then I must put it to what I think. I wasn't involved with somebody in the last five years but my relationship changed greatly with my

husband, and all I can assume is that that's what it means. But you have to put them into something that you think is going to suit the way you feel about it."

"And what about the future? Did you get any clues as to that?"

"No, he said there was going to be a change in the next 6 months, what started 18 months, 6 months ago... something about I have to now finish off something that I thought I've always wanted to. Clean things up and get on to what I want to do."

"Does that ring a bell?"

"Yes in a way it does I suppose. I write bits here and there and I thought to myself, well, perhaps he means I really have to start that book now, you know. There's a book in all of us isn't there"? And I think maybe I have to do it now."

"Do the things he's told you... they are going to change how you behave, a little?"

"No, I would say I don't really think so, no."

"But about this book?"

"Well yes, I mean he's just making... how do you put it... clarifying perhaps what I've been thinking. Yes, in that way maybe you're right. Whether I'm going to sit down when it gets to six months and say my god, six months is here I really should have started this book because, you know, I was told that things were going to be done in 6 months, it might be in the 7th or 8th. I'm not saying that because he said it I will do it in that amount of time."

"Nevertheless what he's told you has been helpful to you?"

'Yes, sure, character-wise I suppose, yes."

"Do you follow your stars?"

'Yes I do, in the newspapers I do. Don't we all? Don't we all like to know we're going to meet a tall dark stranger, handsome man somewhere?"

"But how much credibility... I mean you follow it daily, or slavishly, or just out of interest...?"

"I think actually we read them daily, my husband and I both do. Whether we put any reference to it I don't know. I think you just put it down to what happened today and what's going to happen tomorrow. One of the interesting things he said was about health. He said I had a good health, but that I think... one way he put it was something about I don't accept... you know, how as you get a bit older you can't do the things you did 5 or 10 years ago. And he's absolutely right when he says that I have to learn to accept that gracefully and tone down

what your abilities are with your ageing. Otherwise my health was good. Which was encouraging to know, because I do tend to get really frustrated just 'cos I can't open a bottle I used to be able to open a year ago."

"And was he clear in the exposition he gave you? Did it seem clear?"

"Mm, I can't really say. Only the bits I heard that I wanted to take in at that particular time. Yes, I suppose so. I suppose it's something you need to do on a much... read into much more, then to be able to decide yes it was."

"Has it made you feel better, Bridget?"

"I suppose so. I suppose in a way where you can take it away and think about it and reflect on it and think well yes, I'm going to. Perhaps made me a bit more positive, (laughs) Is that good?"

This concludes the first interview.

Here is the second client's interview.

Joan: "Laura, what was it like as an experience?"

Laura *(Taurus): "Very interesting. I was very impressed. I do go into these things very sceptical, and I wait for them to prove to me what they think I'm like and only then will I come round to that. So yes, he was very good."*

"And did he prove it?"

"Yes. Yes, definitely."

"What did he get right?"

"Nearly everything. Really, nearly everything. I got flashbacks of when I was younger, that I could put points that he told me to. The only thing he probably wasn't right was the... sort of, love aspect at the moment. 'Cos I'm in a longstanding relationship which is rock-solid, it has been the whole way through. Again, he picked up with new boyfriends and things like that which hasn't happened."

"Thought there might have been a hiccup two years ago?"

"No, no, nothing there at all."

"Now what about being a schemer?"

"Definitely, I'm definitely a schemer, yep. I cheat at games. I will go out of my way to make sure I win things. Definitely. At the back of my mind I'll be scheming to get my own way."

"Were you surprised he discovered that?"

"Yes. Yes, very much so."

"Because there were no clues."

"No. Not at all. I don't know whether that's a Taurean trait, or me as a person but yes I'm definitely a schemer."

"Will what he's told you change your attitude to things?"

"The health problem bothered me a little bit because yes, I'm definitely like that. I will plough on because I'm very strong and I will just go hundred miles an hour on everything I do, which I do, and I can't see myself slowing down when I get older. So that I'll probably take on board and see what I can do about that in the future."

"So you would let it affect your behaviour?"

'Yes, yes definitely."

"What do you think of the person he presented. The true you?"

"Yes, mmm definitely."

"How much didn't match, how much did match?"

"I would say 95% of it matched. There were a few points probably he wasn't so on the nail, but it was very minimal, so I totally took on board everything he said."

"What do you make of the whole technique?"

"It's very interesting. To be honest I wouldn't have believed it. I can't see how anybody could predict exactly what a person's like from the time and date you were born. But, he proved me wrong!"

"You're impressed?"

"Yes, definitely."

At a later date, for another section of the same documentary, both women were interviewed again. They were asked if they thought there was any chance *at all* that I was some sort of con artist, rather than a genuine astrologer. Both women declared that they did *not* think this was possible.

Afterword

I always enjoy taking part in TV shows, but I recall this occasion as being especially happy and enjoyable. I would like to place on record my thanks to all concerned. The production team did an excellent job of organising the whole experiment, and they enforced all the conditions very strictly. I was naturally very pleased to hear that my reading was considered to be "99.9%" and "95%" accurate! It was also most intriguing to hear the more

sceptical of the two clients suggest I had "proved" that astrology works.

The reading gets used again...

Some time after the above demonstration, I was contacted by British journalist, broadcaster and author John Diamond. John was writing a piece on psychics for 'She' magazine. He had already seen three professional psychics, and for comparison he wanted me to give him the cold reading treatment (even though he knew I was a fake). Being pushed for time, I simply rehashed the above reading on the computer so that the sign was 'Taurus' and the gender was changed from female to male throughout. Otherwise, I left it exactly as it was. I duly presented the reading to John, and his considered judgement was that it was "about 88%" accurate. This was a higher rating than he gave to any of the three psychics he consulted!

[At this point I must digress briefly. In 1997, after the above meeting, John Diamond was diagnosed with cancer. He eventually passed away in March 2001. John wrote a truly wonderful book called "C: Because Cowards Get Cancer Too", all about his experiences from the initial diagnosis onwards. You may imagine you would never want to read a book about someone's fight with cancer. Think again. There are simply no words to describe how excellent this book is, or how rewarding it is to read. Incredibly moving and often very funny, yet never morbid or self-pitying, it is superbly well-written and I suggest that you read it.]

The reading gets used one more time...

On another occasion, I was invited by Paramount Television to be a guest on the 'Leeza Gibbons' show in Los Angeles. They too wanted a cold reading demonstration, but the set up was a little different. They arranged things so that before the show I met four women from the studio audience for five minutes each. This time I posed as a clairvoyant - no tarot cards, no astrology chart, just me and my 'psychic vibrations'.

As I met each client, I told her that once I had picked up 'vibrations', I would prepare a report of my clairvoyant impressions which the production team would quickly type up and present for her assessment. This was untrue. Before flying to LA, I simply re-vamped the above reading, deleting the astrological jargon and replacing it with terms more suited to a

clairvoyant reading. Otherwise, I left it unchanged. I printed out four identical copies which I took with me on the plane, and these were the 'reports' which the four 'Leeza' audience members received. All four of them gave it a better than 80% accuracy rating!

I must mention in passing that this was another very enjoyable TV experience, and the producers did a wonderfully efficient job of setting up this experiment despite an acute lack of time. I was also made to feel very welcome by all concerned, which was nice given that I was four thousand miles from the damp little rock I call home.

All in all, the reading has served me very well indeed. Its basic content has been dressed as an astrological reading for a female Virgo, a female Taurean and a male Taurean. It has served as a clairvoyant report. It has been presented to intelligent 'clients' who ranged from the mildly credulous to the openly sceptical, from South Africa, England and America. It has always been rated as *at least* "80% accurate", and in its original form secured votes of "99.9%" and "95%" accuracy.

Progress Review

In Section Three, we have seen two examples of cold reading under test conditions. I believe these demonstrations are strong evidence that cold reading really works. Whether any psychics in real life actually use cold reading is a separate question, and one which I will leave to your judgement.

Having looked at how cold reading works, it is interesting to look at how to *prevent* it working. This is the subject of Section Four. Before that, a second and final Interlude.

Interlude 2: On keeping an open mind

The notion of 'keeping an open mind' arises so often in the context of psychic readings that it warrants separate discussion. Time and time again, I have seen psychics urging commentators, clients, sceptics, TV viewers, journalists and anyone else who will listen to 'keep an open mind'. The implication is that an open mind is a characteristic of the fair, the reasonable and the intelligent. By implication, anyone who does not have an open mind is unfair and unreasonable, and hence their views can be dismissed. This is nonsense.

An open mind is appropriate in situations *where we have no good evidence one way or the other.* Suppose I meet someone for the first time. Should I be prejudiced about that person's character, likeability or integrity, based on their looks or race or creed or accent or anything else? Of course not. I should retain an open mind as to what that person is like. They may turn out to be among the most fascinating, likeable and charismatic people I have ever met. Or not. Time will tell.

The same applies to other facets of life. If I want to pursue a given goal, perhaps creative or business-related, should I assume from the start that I will never succeed and my efforts will be wasted? Not at all. It is far better to retain an open-mind, to give it my best shot - with a positive attitude and the corresponding positive effort - and see where I get to.

What about those involved in scientific research? Should they be making pre-judgements about what they will, or will not, discover? Just to take one example, will research into genetic engineering ultimately provide a cure for cancer? An open mind is all we can have, because at the moment we just do not know.

In all these cases, an open mind is appropriate. However, it is inappropriate to retain an open mind in cases *where there is already plentiful evidence backing one view as against another.*

Imagine you are in a plane flying at 20,000 feet. The captain of the plane starts thinking along these lines, "Gee, everything in the

history of aeronautical science, and every experience of every airline pilot in history, suggests that to keep this thing in the air I need to keep the engines running. But hey, I'm going to keep an open mind. I'm going to cut all the engines, and dump our remaining fuel. Who knows, maybe the plane will still fly." Do you really want that captain to keep an open mind about this?

Or imagine you're dining with friends at a favourite restaurant, and you have ordered the tomato soup. Do you really want the chef to be thinking, "Well now, everything we know about human nutrition, and every ounce of gastronomic training I have, suggests that I should *not* add a large dose of cyanide to this soup. But hey, I'm going to keep an open mind. Maybe it will taste better, and everyone will love it."

These are absurd examples, but only because the notion of keeping an open mind in these circumstances is absurd. It is similarly absurd with regard to the claims made by psychics.

Serious and devoted psychic research dates back to at least the start of the 20th century. It has been vigorously pursued all around the world, and in some cases has been extremely well-funded (in some cases courtesy of military budgets in search of a new advantage over the enemy). This is a lot of research, in a lot of places, over a lot of time. All this work, all this effort and all this time has failed to deliver any good evidence *whatsoever* that psychic ability exists - at least, not of the kind allegedly manifesting itself in psychic readings.

This does not amount to *proof* that psychic beliefs are bogus remnants of outmoded, irrational and superstitious models of the world we live in. But it does amount to good reason to abandon an open mind', and to say instead that if the believers want us to acknowledge the reality of psychic ability, the onus is on them to prove their case. Whatever proof they provide, it will have to consist of something that cannot equally be attributed to the effectiveness of cold reading.

In cases where prior knowledge is available, the alternative to 'an open mind' is not 'a closed mind'. It is 'an informed mind'. In such contexts, any appeal to 'keep an open mind' is an appeal to prefer ignorance over knowledge. This is not advisable.

Section Four

Blocking techniques

"Men become superstitious, not because they have too much imagination, but because they are not aware that they have any."

- George Santayana, 'Little Essays'

Section 4: Blocking techniques

Cold reading is a versatile process. It can be used to deliver any kind of psychic reading. What is more, it seems to work on virtually any client, no matter how intelligent or sceptical they are. In fact, cold reading is so effective that there is literally only one way in which it can fail. If the client knows how cold reading works, and knows how to block it, then the cold reader is beaten.

By reading this far, you have learned how cold reading works. Armed with this information, you can probably begin to see for yourself how to block the cold reading process. In this section, I want to present you with five golden rules for blocking any attempt to use cold reading on you.

In case you want to try these rules out by actually going see a psychic, I need to mention one point about taping the reading.

Taping the reading

These days many psychics offer to tape the reading for you at very little extra cost, so you can review the tape at your leisure.

What you need to realise is that if the psychic is taping the reading, she controls the tape recorder and the tape. If she is unhappy with the way things have gone, she can and will refuse to hand over the tape. For example, if she has been forced to give up she may well make no charge (or refund your money) but at the same time refuse to let you have the tape. Plainly, it is not in her interests to have this intriguing souvenir of her abject failure freely available to anyone interested in hearing it. Who knows, you might want to play it to your friends. Or even to a local journalist, or to your local Trading Standards officer. If you are an incredibly wise, kind and thoughtful person, you might even want to send a copy to me!

For this reason, *you need to make your own tape of the reading.* You can do this covertly using a concealed microphone and

recorder. Alternatively, you can do it openly by taking along your own portable tape recorder and plonking it down on the table. If you do it openly, the psychic may get rather wary and assure you that she is happy to tape the session for you. You bet she is! All you need to do is invent some reason why you prefer to do it for yourself, rather than rely on her 'kind offer'. Your reason does not necessarily have to make a whole lot of sense. Here are some ideas:

- you are something of an audio buff, and you prefer to use special high-formulation 'chrome tri-oxide ZR-II' tapes (make something up) which you think give best results
- you are a Capricorn and you are therefore fond of operating technical gadgetry
- you have borrowed the tape recorder from a friend who has offered to sell it to you, and you want to check out how well it works
- you were given the tape recorder by your partner, and he/she will feel hurt if you do not use their lovely gift
- you always feel it is best to do things for yourself
- you have regular psychic readings, once every four months, and you always tape them yourself
- a long time ago a very good psychic told you always to tape your own readings, as then they become more a part of your own spiritual life

So now, with your knowledge of cold reading and your trusty tape machine whirring away, you are ready to block the cold reading process. Here are the five golden rules.

1. Stay calm, stay reasonable

It is important for effective blocking that you keep perfectly calm, polite and good-natured at all times. This puts you in a position of control, and means you can think and act in a considered and effective manner.

It is also the fairest approach. If you were to adopt a hostile or confrontational stance, this would - according to psychic lore - also block a totally genuine psychic attempting to give you the benefit of authentic psychic ability and insight. This is not the aim. The aim is to block cold reading being passed off as something

else. So, keep your cool, be fair, pleasant, sweet and good-natured. Remember to remain interested in the reading, and to encourage the psychic in her efforts to deliver your reading.

2. Insist questions are recognised as such

The earlier section on 'Extracting Information' detailed many different ways in which cold readers can ask questions without making this obvious. Do not let the psychic get away with this. If you detect that you are being asked a question, your first move is to clarify that this is indeed what is happening. You can say something like this:

> *"I'm sorry, but I'm confused. Let me just be clear about this - are you telling me something, or are you asking me to give you information?".*

This forces the central issue out into the open - are you receiving information, or being asked to provide it? As we have already seen, psychics dress their questions in numerous disguises. Your aim is to make it clear that these disguises will not work on you. If the psychic uses information prompts such as "Can you find a connection?" or "Does this mean something to you?", it is important that you recognise these as questions, and drag this recognition out into the open:

> *"Just let me understand this correctly - are you now telling me something, or are you asking* me *to tell* <u>you</u> *something? Is that a question?".*

This is important preparation for blocking technique number 3.

3. Do not answer questions

In a supposedly psychic reading, you are paying to receive information, not to provide it. Hence whenever you are asked a question, or otherwise prompted for information, you are entitled to decline to offer information. There are many fair and polite ways of doing this. Here is one fairly direct approach. Remember, it is vital to remain good-natured and encouraging:

> *"If you don't mind, I'd prefer not to answer questions. I'm more interested in what you can tell me, rather than what I can tell you. So please carry on with the reading. I'm sure it will be fascinating."*

A useful addition, if you need it, is to provide a rationale which is supportive of psychic ability, like this:

"I have some sceptical friends who like to think fake psychics just prompt their clients for information, and then sort of feed it back somehow and twist it around to look psychic. I want to make sure I don't provide any information, so that I can assure my friends that you're different, and your psychic abilities are genuine."

When you get more direct prompts, such as "Tell me, who is Jane?", a good line is to point out that the question is meaningless, which it is. You could say something like this:

"I'm sorry, I don't understand the question. 'Who is Jane?' doesn't mean anything. Could you be a little clearer what you're getting at?"

It can also be useful for blocking purposes to point out that the psychic is (supposedly) the one with access to information:

"You must excuse me, but I'm not sure I follow this. You're asking me a question, 'Who is Jane?'. Well, how am I to know? I'm not psychic. I hoped the tarot [or whatever] was going to answer questions for me, not that I was going to answer questions for the tarot."

Another time-honoured blocking technique is simply to answer a question with a question. After all, if the psychic can ask questions, so can you! Carrying on with the same "Who is Jane" example as above, you could come back with:

"Which Jane do you mean?"

Or:

"What's her surname?"

Either of these responses are poisonous to the cold reading process, but perfectly fair for a genuine psychic. Why should the tarot be able to deliver first names but not surnames?

If the situation becomes argumentative, your line should be to remain calm and unruffled, and address the issue directly, like this:

"I don't understand this. Are you saying that you are unable to give me a reading unless I give you information first? I feel that would be like me talking to a mirror. I'm having trouble understanding what's meant to be psychic about this."

4. Do not provide feedback

As we have already seen, cold reading relies to a great extent on feedback. Hence to block cold reading, you make sure you do

not provide it. Evading questions is one way of doing this. The other is to provide feedback which is useless for cold reading purposes. For example, suppose the psychic provides a response cue such as "And I believe this is making sense to you isn't it?". You can say:

"I really don't know. I'd need time to think about what you're saying, and mull it over. You know, it's a bit difficult here and now to just agree or disagree right off the top of my head. I'll think about it later, when I have time to think it over properly."

There are countless variations on the same theme. You may like to review all the earlier sections which explained how psychics try to prompt clients for feedback. It is worth developing a repertoire of responses which are totally non-committal and uninformative, and yet which encourage the psychic to carry on with the reading. Your bywords should be indecision, delay and ignorance. Here are some suggestions:

"I can't really decide if I agree or not. It's hard to say. I'll think about it. Please carry on, this is fascinating."

"I'm unsure on that. You may have something, you may not. I'll consider it later. What's next?"

"Gee, that's difficult for me to say. I don't think I could give you a firm yes or a no to that right now. Do go on, I'm intrigued."

"I wouldn't really know. I'd have to get back to you on that one. I'll certainly bear in mind what you're saying."

"Well, the jury's still out on that one. I wouldn't really be able to agree or disagree. I'll have to pass for now. Please go on, this is interesting."

There are not many cold readers who could succeed in the face of this consistent lack of feedback.

5. Sabotage the elements

In Section Two of this book we saw 38 elements that can play a part in cold reading. Every single element has an underlying structure or formula. In every case, if you understand the formula, you can completely sabotage that particular element. You do this by (a) openly addressing the structure or formula involved, and then (b) subverting it.

Let us look at a few of the more common examples, starting with the Rainbow Ruse. The psychic offers something like this:

"You can be a very considerate person, but there are times when you recognise a selfish streak in yourself."

If you understand how the Rainbow Ruse works, you know that it credits the client with both a personality trait *and* its opposite, thereby covering all the bases. Hence the appropriate blocking technique is to bring out this structure, and ask for a description which says you are one thing or the other:

"I'm sorry, but what you've just said sounds as if you're telling me I am considerate but I'm also not considerate. I don't follow. Which one do you mean?"

In similar vein, consider a Greener Grass statement. If you happen to be evidently a very 'career-oriented' sort of person, you might get offered a Greener Grass statement about domestic and family life. You know that this kind of statement works by attributing to the client some hankering after the life choices she did not pursue. To block it, you bring out the structure and then sink it, like this:

"Oh I see, you mean that I could be interested in the other choices that I might have made in life, but didn't. Well, I have to disagree. I'm happy with the choices I made. That's why I made them."

I am sure you are getting the hang of the idea. Next, let us try a Fuzzy Fact. Here is an example from the earlier section:

"I can see a connection with Europe, possibly the UK or it could be the warmer, Mediterranean part?"

The same blocking formula applies. First, you bring out the underlying structure, in this case the complete lack of any meaningful context. Then, you render it useless. Like this:

"Well it's kind of hard for me to answer that until I know what you mean. What sort of connection are you talking about"? Personal, social, professional... or what? Are you referring to the present or the past? And what do you mean by 'a connection' anyway?"

I could provide more examples, but I feel I have laboured the point enough already. The basic blocking technique remains the same: bring out the structure, then blow it to pieces.

Psychic baiting

Psychic baiting is a great new fun way to pass your leisure hours. My hope is that it will become a popular new pastime all over the world. In essence, psychic baiting is the only sure way to demonstrate that someone giving readings is using cold reading, not genuine psychic ability. It involves going for a reading and allowing the psychic - which I stress means 'cold reader' in this case - to get snared by her own methods.

Warning: *It is obviously inadvisable to try psychic baiting if you feel that this would place you in jeopardy or that you might get harmed. Some cold readers might be less than peaceful if they feel you are interfering with their trade. You undertake any activity along these lines entirely at your own risk, and I cannot be held responsible for the consequences. If you feel there is any chance of confrontation or harm, don't do it!*

So how does it work? All that you have to do, as the client, is to wait until the psychic offers you some verifiable piece of information which, as it happens, is *not* true. You then tell a fib by agreeing to it, even though it is false. Next, you encourage the psychic to develop this thread, until some minutes later you spring the trap.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Imagine that you are having a tarot reading, and the reader says:

> "There are indications here of a new professional role, does this mean something to you?"

Now, for the sake of the example, let us assume that this is completely false, and it means nothing to you at all. Here is how the baiting works.

Step 1. Express enthusiastic agreement, and just for good measure add one more piece of false information. For example, if you happen to be a single woman, you could say:

> *"That's quite amazing actually, because two weeks ago I got a new job at the same company where my husband works. We were both really pleased."*

Step 2. Encourage development of the theme:

> *"I was hoping you might pick up on that because it's very important to us both. I'm glad I got the job, but it is quite a difficult challenge for me."*

This encourages the psychic to develop this theme, rather than change to something else. With any luck, the psychic will then offer a typical follow-up line. This will very probably incorporate the supplementary piece of disinformation that you planted, like this:

> "Well, one thing I can see is that both you and your husband are in for a difficult time of transition, but it will be well worth it in the end. I can see plenty of happiness in your new role, and I can also see that it will open up many new horizons for you. The key is to see the challenges as opportunities, which is what they are."

Step 3. Agree, encourage more development, and refer to the alleged mode of the psychic divination. For tarot cards, the reader is supposed to be divining information by looking at the cards. So you say something like:

> *"I have to say that does sound right, it certainly fits in with my expectations. What else can you see in the cards about this new job?"*

The psychic now thinks she has hit a home run, so she will be happy to progress:

> "I see some minor problems with one of your new colleagues, or with your new boss, but these will be ironed out smoothly in time. Also, while your new role will be satisfying financially, I can tell you that you will also encounter new areas of expenditure. All will come good in the end, but you must learn to take the long-term view. In fact, there are some financial opportunities just around the corner that will help, provided you assess them wisely."

Step 4. Praise the accuracy of the psychic method in use, be it tarot cards or astrology or whatever. Encourage the psychic to chime in with self-satisfied words confirming the dependability of her psychic modus operandi:

> *"It's amazing. I had no idea the tarot could really be so accurate".*
>
> "Well, it's never easy to be clear or certain, but the cards are often a wonderful window on to truth."

Step 5. Bide your time, and be content to let the psychic tell you more about your husband and this non-existent new job. Once you have given her enough rope with which to hang herself, spring the trap by announcing the truth. Say:

> *"Well, I'm confess I am rather puzzled about one thing. I don't have a husband, and I haven't started a new job. How can you*

see things about a husband and a job which I just made up?"

At this stage, the psychic may realise the game is up. Alternatively, she may remonstrate and point out that you had previously agreed with her statements. In which case, you say:

"That's right. I lied. But that doesn't explain how you 'saw' my husband in the cards when I don't even have one."

It should be clear from this example that baiting can only work once the psychic has mentioned something *factual.* It cannot be based on a statement which concerns the future, or which is merely hypothetical or conditional in nature. You must wait until something specific comes along which you know is not true.

Now that you have got the hang of psychic baiting, let us look at a completely different example. Suppose you are in the presence of a highly gifted medium, who offers you a vague description of someone she says is 'coming through':

"I'm sensing a presence of someone who passed about two years ago, and possibly the problem was in the heart or chest area. It's an elderly gentleman, who at one time had a beard. Does the name Harry or Henry mean something to you?"

Let us assume that this means nothing to you at all.

Step 1. Express agreement, and plant disinformation:

"Oh my goodness, really? It must be my grandfather, Henry. He passed over just before his wife, Emily."

Step 2. Encourage development:

"Do you know, on my way here I had a funny feeling he'd come through."

"Yes, that often happens. Well, he's here now, and he wants me to tell you how proud he is of you, but he's concerned that you're working too hard."

Step 3. Agree, and refer to the psychic method in use:

"Oh, that's just exactly the sort of thing he <u>would</u> say. It's amazing that you can get messages through from the other side so clearly."

"Well, don't thank me, I'm just a channel."

Step 4. Praise the accuracy:

"But it's so amazing. I mean, it's almost as if he's here in the room with me."

Step 5. Bide your time, and allow the psychic to produce all the rope you need to hang her out to dry. When quite a few details have emerged about non-existent Grandpa Henry and his equally fictitious wife Emily, it is time to say:

> *"Mind you, there is one thing that puzzles me a little bit. I've never had a grandfather called Henry, nor anyone in the family called Emily. So what's going on here? How can you be getting messages from people I have just made up off the top of my head?"*

The same basic formula can be used to bait any kind of psychic. You just have to adjust the game slightly, depending on what kind of psychic brilliance is on offer.

I repeat my earlier warning and disclaimer. I cannot be held responsible for whatever happens if you try these tactics. Some cold-readers are very hostile to anyone who can damage their thriving trade. You undertake any such activity at your own risk.

Psychic-baiting is versatile. It is equally damaging to any form of cold reading. If the astrologer sees that you have had some romantic distress, look sad and own up to your recent commencement of (imaginary) divorce proceedings. Get the psychic to develop this theme further, before confessing that you have never been married, and are not having a divorce.

If the graphologist detects some managerial flair, smugly own up to the fact that you run a large sales department for a major company. Glean all you can from the psychic about your wholly imaginary management role, and later on mention that you have never so much as stood in a sales department, let alone run one. And so on.

Provided it can be undertaken safely, psychic baiting is great fun, and all the more so if you have the evidence on tape. What is more, if you do it right it ought to cost you nothing, since it should result in the 'psychic' terminating the reading, cancelling the fee, and wanting to see the back of you as soon as yesterday.

Progress Review

In Section Four we have looked at ways of stopping cold reading from being used on you. We have also looked at 'Psychic Baiting', which is even more fun when you try it out than it looks on paper.

Section Five

Additional notes

"The ability to discriminate between that which is true and that which is false is one of the last attainments of the human mind."

- James Fennimore Cooper, 'The American Democrat'

Section 5: Additional notes

The sections you have read so far provide a complete description of how cold reading works, and how to *stop* it working against you. In this concluding section, I want to clear up a few other points which often crop up.

Instant readings

The cold reading methods I have described in this book are quite elaborate, and can furnish detailed readings of almost any duration, with 25-30 minutes being typical. However, some psychics specialise in rapid-fire 'instant' readings, such as quick readings given during radio broadcasts.

In these situations, some psychics like to play safe and keep things as cautious and generalised as possible. They tend to rely on Barnum Statements, Pollyanna Pearls, Veiled Questions and so on, all of which lend themselves very well to instant readings. It is not a problem if the reading comes across as rather bland. They can always point out that they would *normally* give the clients a much more detailed reading, but for the purposes of a lively radio show they have to keep things moving along. This serves as a good advertisement for personal consultations which, I feel sure, will be very reasonably priced.

Others may throw caution to the winds and include many more Good Chance Guesses, Lucky Guesses and Folk Stat Statements, and take the risk of being wrong as often as they are right. There is no harm done, since only the impressive hits will be remembered. The psychic can also attribute the misses to the very circumstances of trying to give quick readings over the airwaves (who knows, maybe radio waves interfere with psychic ones?).

Mnemonics

Some psychics facilitate the cold reading process by using simple tried-and-tested memory systems. I myself have used a mnemonic system which gave me one or two key words for every card in a tarot pack. These key words had nothing to do with the actual meanings the cards are supposed to have. They just provided me with prompts for something to say, ensuring that I never ran out of material for the reading.

Using set methods like this can turn up some very surprising hits. A very talented cold reader I know was once giving readings at a home for senior citizens. At one stage, he was giving a reading to an elderly lady of very advanced years. A particular card came up which, in my friend's system, always cued him to refer to a wedding celebration. Since this seemed plainly inappropriate, he momentarily hesitated. However, being short of time to think of anything else, he decided to just stick to his system. At this, the onlookers roared with laughter and amazement - this very elderly lady had recently announced her engagement to one of the men in the same home! It was all my friend could do to conceal the fact that he was more amazed than anyone.

Mnemonics can also be used in other ways. Some psychics, who are especially devoted to their work, use simple memory techniques to remember details about their clients and the main themes that came out of the reading. Should the psychic meet the same client again, the psychic can pick up where she left off, as it were, and avoid saying anything which contradicts her previous reading. Of course, there is no need to use sophisticated memory aids to do this - a set of file cards works better and is easier to use

Meet the expert

If you are interested in memory techniques, then I suggest you refer to the several books published by my friend Dominic O'Brien. At the time of writing, Dominic has won the World Memory Championships eight times in all since its inception in 1991. He secured his first entry in the Guinness Book of Records in 1989, when he memorised the correct sequence *of six* decks of cards randomly shuffled together, or 312 cards in total. However, Dominic is nothing if not determined to prove that his memory training systems really work, and in 1995 he memorised no less than 40 decks shuffled together. That is 2080 cards, which Dominic was able to recall in correct sequence having seen each card just once.

He can do sprints as well as marathons. Dominic has memorised the order of 1 deck of cards in 38.29 seconds (verified by Guinness) or 27.5 seconds (personal best). I have seen him do this first-hand, at a private dinner party, and it is simply phenomenal to witness.

Among my friends, I am known for organising a rather strange birthday party each year at which I usually persuade some of my fellow entertainers to participate in an informal live 'cabaret'. One year, Dominic came along and invited two guests to compose a 100 digit number entirely at random. Dominic then committed the entire 100 digit number to memory in 2 minutes. If you do not think that sounds very entertaining, you obviously have never seen the remarkable Mr. O'Brien in action. He simply brought the house down, and won the most fervent and enthusiastic applause I think I have ever witnessed.

I could write much, much more about the rather awesome Mr. O'Brien, and his self-taught talents (including the card-counting skills which have earned him a ban from every casino chain in the world). Suffice it to say that if you want to learn anything - anything at all - about memory techniques then your wisest course is to get hold of Dominic's books and study his methods.

Hot reading

Cold reading concerns readings which are given to complete strangers *without any prior information.* 'Hot reading' or 'warm reading' is trade jargon for covertly obtaining information about the client before the reading. This is an area which I have looked into, and it is quite staggering how much you can find out about someone ahead of time without them knowing. Magicians, con artists, detectives and those in the espionage trade have all devised many excellent methods for gaining information about a person without them ever knowing.

There is good evidence to suggest that some psychics use assorted forms of hot reading. If the psychic works from an office, or from her own home, she may employ various simple ruses to glean some useful information. For example, the visiting client may be welcomed by a charming assistant who kindly relieves her of her purse and coat. Unknown to the client, the innocuous assistant rifles through these possessions for any useful clues which are then supplied to the psychic just before the reading begins. Another time-honoured trick is for the assistant to nip

outside and peer through the windows of the visiting client's car - just in case it contains any clues to her lifestyle and interests.

Hot spiritualism

Another ruse is for psychics to pass information about regular clients among themselves. People who have studied the spiritualist movement have written of spirit mediums compiling notes on regular clients which they then readily share among themselves. Not only does this allow psychics to be exquisitely well-prepared for certain clients, it also means they all "sing from the same song sheet" and therefore boost their collective credibility in the client's eyes.

Spiritualists are also reported to have assisted the success of their larger stage demonstrations, especially if the media are going to be present, using hot reading techniques. For example, the psychic may send out free tickets to the event to clients whom she has known for years or even decades. To the millions of entranced TV viewers, the psychic seems to be delivering astonishingly accurate statements to complete strangers. In reality, the 'complete stranger' may have been visiting the psychic regularly for the past 20 years, openly discussing every aspect of her life and that of her deceased relatives.

Psychics who give televised demonstrations of their awesome gift often enjoy many opportunities to gain 'hot' tips before the cameras roll. Many TV producers see no harm in allowing the psychic (or associates) to mingle ahead of time with those members of the audience to whom she will give a reading on air. If conditions are very lax, the psychic may ask direct questions or otherwise extract information that will be useful later on. Even if this is not allowed, the psychic may well notice some useful details, such as a pendant bearing a particular initial, or a photograph of a deceased relative being handed over to the production team so it can be 'grabbed' as a still image and shown on screen during the programme.

One of my correspondents, Ben Whiting, tells me that some travelling fortune-tellers, who call from house to house, leave behind coded information about the occupants of each house they call on. This code, apparently called 'patrin', covers such information as how many people live at that address, the number of children, any recent bereavements or impending marriages, and so on. Hence any other fortune-teller who understands the code, and who passes along the same way, has a head start. I

have no first-hand knowledge of this, but it is hardly implausible. I do know that the police used to maintain information about similar signs and marks left on 'visited' property by thieves and burglars, as a courtesy among their own kind, although I have no idea whether this is still done.

The realm of the impossible

From the above discussion, it follows that psychics can, and sometimes do, obtain information about clients beforehand. In general, to assert that it would have been "impossible" for a psychic to know something about a client in advance is to assert a nonsense. It may be hard to imagine how information could have found its way from A to B, but this is scarcely the same as being impossible.

To illustrate this point, let me share a story with you. I assure you from the outset that this is absolutely true.

I once visited a college where I was due to give a show in a smart and well-equipped student theatre. Upon my arrival, I was introduced to a pleasant young woman called Becky who ran the theatre, and with whom I discussed my sound and lighting requirements. Becky was moderately interested in what my show was about, and I suppose that she and I chatted together for at least 20 minutes or so.

If I were in the business of claiming genuine psychic powers, my meeting with Becky would have been a perfect opportunity to demonstrate my "inexplicable" gifts. I would have been able to tell Becky a huge amount of information about her past life, including dozens of tiny, specific details: things she was doing 15 years previously, names of people she knew, accidents she was involved in, places she had visited, times she had enjoyed, times she had cried, romances that had failed... and so on. Becky would have been astounded, and would have sworn that I had never previously met her or anyone she knew. The incident would have seemed an impenetrable mystery, one with which my acolytes could taunt the "closed-minded drones" of orthodox science, gleefully challenging them to "explain that away". It would have made a lovely chapter in books about my astonishing psychic gifts.

The fact is that I *had* known Becky quite well, some 15 or 16 years previously. She and I had both attended the same university, and had both been in a medium-sized theatre group putting on a show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Becky simply

did not remember me, and had no recollection of the few weeks when we had been in Edinburgh together. How to account for this? Perhaps it is a testament to my weak personality and general dearth of charisma. Then again, my appearance had changed quite a lot from my student days (and so had Becky's, come to that). Also, some people are just not terribly good at remembering people from the distant past. Whatever the reasons in this particular case, this story illustrates the fact that you can never be *certain* a psychic is operating without prior knowledge. Even if the client herself sincerely believes this to be true.

I myself have never used hot reading, nor has it ever seemed necessary. For the record, my TV demonstrations (such as those transcribed in Section Three) have never involved 'hot' reading or any kind of prior information.

Can anyone learn cold reading?

This is a common question, and the answer is the same for cold reading as for anything else. Almost anyone can try their hand at it, but there will always be some who have more natural aptitude than others. Good cold reading tends to require the gift of the gab, modest acting ability, lack of nerves, and a touch of 'stage presence'. If a person has these qualities, he or she can probably learn to be a good cold-reader. Charm and charisma obviously help, but I seem to have done okay despite a conspicuous lack of both.

It is important to point out that different practitioners learn cold reading in different ways. It is a little bit like playing the piano: some learn from books, some are taught, some more or less teach themselves as they go along. Some have a very analytical approach, and teach themselves by studying and practising for many years (which is what I did). Others more or less develop the knack without trying.

It is perfectly possible for someone to become a skilled cold reader without realising it. Anyone who begins to give readings to friends for fun will get at least a few very favourable responses. The longer they carry on, the more they will develop the knack of saying things which people find meaningful. Before long, they will be quite convinced of their own innate psychic gifts, based on the very favourable reactions they get. The best account of this process is probably Susan Blackmore's book 'The Adventures of a Parapsychologist', in which she relates how she herself began to

believe she must possess a psychic gift. In time, she was able to see she was in fact cold reading without even trying.

In consequence, neither I nor anyone else can point to a psychic and say they are intentionally deceiving their clients. To do that, I would have to be a mind-reader! What I can say is that *if* there is no such thing as psychic ability (which happens to be my opinion), *then* anyone who claims to be psychic is either deceiving themselves or deceiving others.

Progress Review

This is the end of Section Five. We have seen what cold reading is, how it works, and how it can be prevented from working.

If you have followed all the material in these five sections, you can be confident that you know as much about cold reading as almost anyone else - including those who practise it!

Section Six

Non-psychic contexts

"Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away"

- Philip K. Dick

Section 6: Non-psychic contexts

Introduction

So far in this book, we have looked at a range of techniques which someone can use to create the impression that they are psychic. I believe that some of these techniques can be applied to other contexts which have nothing to do with the psychic industry. In fact, I would suggest that some of them could apply to almost any context where two people meet and one wishes to influence what the other thinks or feels. In this, the sixth and final section of this book, I want to explore this possibility and share some ideas.

We're going to look at three different contexts:

1. selling
2. romance and relationships
3. criminal interrogation

These are the three subjects that people mention most often when they ask me about the various uses of cold reading (CR) techniques. Each one of these subjects could probably fill a book, but for now this relatively superficial account will have to suffice.

I shall continue to refer to the techniques I've described as 'cold reading techniques', even though we are now exploring how they might be applied to contexts *other* than psychic readings.

Cold reading and selling

In one way or another, I have been involved in selling for over twenty years. For many moons I earned a living writing and producing sales and marketing material for numerous different companies, ranging from small 'two men and a dog' outfits to large multi-nationals. My clients spanned most industry sectors - from heavy engineering to lingerie, Pharmaceuticals to banking, information technology to shoes. Just to add further variety, these assignments covered many different media - print, audio, video, web and live presentations. Although much of this work was undeniably pedestrian, it taught me a great deal about corporate selling, and in particular about honing a sales message and finding effective ways to deliver it. In several cases, I was also involved in training professional sales personnel.

Of course, there is no substitute for first-hand sales experience, and I've had plenty - either selling my own services or those of companies I've worked for. For a brief time, I was even the UK Sales & Marketing Manager for a multi-national web technologies company, which sounds far grander than it actually was. If you want really serious credentials, I've been in several shows at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival - possibly the most fiercely competitive market in the world. If you can hype and sell a show there, you can sell anything anywhere!

I've also had the privilege of working with some really first-rate sales and marketing professionals, two of whom helped me with this section.

Two types of selling

There are essentially two kinds of sales situations.

1. Business-to-business selling. Typically abbreviated to 'B2B sales'. This involves one person in a natty suit selling expensive things and services to another person in a natty suit while they sip coffee in an air-conditioned office. It often involves nauseating buzzwords like 'interface optimization'.

2. **Retail selling.** This involves some poor under-paid soul dealing with infuriating customers who want what they can't describe, can describe what doesn't exist and want nothing they can afford.

In this section I am primarily concerned with business-to-business selling, although at the end I have included a brief note about

retail selling. I am going to refer to my hypothetical sales person as male, which provides a change from the female pronoun used throughout the rest of this book.

Digression: men .v. women

To digress for a moment (by all means skip ahead to the next heading) the two or three best sales people I've ever known were male, but I think that's a fluke. I'd say that *on average* women are better at selling than men, for at least three reasons.

(1) All sales jobs involve a lot of time on the phone, and women use this tool more effectively than men. I once ran a small telesales team which included a young woman, Swiss by birth but very much a citizen of the world, whom I regard as the greatest telesales talent I'll ever hear (and not just because she could sell in five languages). She could open companies like a can-opener, and it was a joy and an education to listen to her in action.

(2) Without question, women are infinitely superior when it comes to self-presentation and grooming. There are still far too many salesmen who go to see clients looking like they get dressed in the dark.

(3) Women are more competitive. Naturally, every man who reads this will disagree, and that's because men often confuse 'aggressive' with 'competitive'. I concede the average salesman may be more aggressive (a contentious point), but in my experience women really are more competitive. For one thing, they *have* to be (just to overcome prejudice and sexism). For another, they know *how* to be. In the words of Rudyard Kipling's excellent poem, 'the female of the species is more deadly than the male'. In fact there are two pieces of good advice I'd give to anyone setting up a sales team. First: hire a woman. Second: hire two, and tell them they're in competition! End of digression.

CR and cold calling (1): accessing the prospect

A lot of business-to-business selling starts with a salesman telephoning companies to see if they're in the market for whatever he's selling. Some call this 'telesales', some call it 'cold calling', and some call it 'hell on Earth'. So how can cold reading techniques help in this situation? To see how, let us briefly reconsider what's happening in the context of a typical psychic reading. Specifically, let's focus on the main goal of whoever is giving the reading. We can summarise the psychic context like

this:

Players: Psychic, client.

Context: Psychic service.

Goal: to be perceived as having access to some significant form of insight, advice or communication.

With different players, in a different context, the goal will also be different. However, the fundamental techniques for *achieving* that goal can remain the same. Now consider the salesman working through his list of target companies. All he really wants to do is access the relevant buyer or decision-maker, and ask them a few questions. In many cases this will be very straightforward. He calls, he gets put through to the right person, and he finds out what he wants to know. However, in a few cases he might come up against someone who, for whatever reason, tries to 'block' what they perceive to be a 'nuisance' sales call. We can summarise the new context like this:

Players: Salesman, various Employees in companies he calls.

Context: Cold calling companies, trying to reach relevant buyers or decision-makers.

Goal: to win co-operation, and access the right person. Not to be seen as a nuisance.

If the salesman comes up against a 'blocker', cold reading techniques may be no use whatsoever. Then again, our salesman has nothing to lose by trying. So he waits a while, then calls the main switchboard and tries a Fuzzy Fact:

"Hello, I hope you can help me. I've got a message here to return a call from someone in your company, but the name's a bit of a scribble. Jones, Johnson, James... I can't quite make it out. All I know is it's to do with buying training courses or sorting out training requirements. Do you know who it could be?"

This completely changes the basis of the dialogue. The conflict between gaining access and blocking access is gone. Instead, it's now just a conversation between someone trying to do a good thing (return a message promptly) and someone else whose job involves facilitating this process.

The salesman mentions names (James, Johnson) which are fairly common and which could sound like *either first names or surnames.* If the relevant decision-maker happens to have a first

name or surname that matches, or sounds close, then the salesman will almost certainly be put through immediately.

If not, the person taking the call will probably come up with the right person, but query the names the salesman mentioned:

> *"Well I can put you through to Larry Brown, who handles most of that kind of thing, but I can't place a Jones or Johnson."*

At this point the salesman can either just glide over the 'wrong' names he mentioned, or he can apply one of the Win-Win Game techniques listed earlier, such as 'Wrong small print, right headline':

> "Hang on... 'Brown' did you say? That's the one. I've got it now. Sorry, I was looking at the wrong file. Could you put me through and I can see why he was calling?"

And so, with a little luck, the salesman gets through to the decision-maker. Of course, the salesman told a small lie in saying that he was returning a call. With a little luck this point will simply get overlooked. Alternatively, the decision-maker may query this. Our undaunted salesman can use another 'Win-Win Game' approach, such as 'I am right, but you do not know':

> *"I'm pretty sure I didn't call you, in fact I've never heard of you."*
>
> "Oh, that's puzzling. Well, it may not have come directly from you, but someone from your company definitely asked us to call you, because I've got this note here in front of me. I don't know... maybe from your head office or another branch or a colleague of yours? I'm relatively new here and picking up some loose ends, so I'm afraid I don't have all the details. Just to make sure I'm not totally on the wrong track, you do sometimes train people in Java don't you?... "

(Java is just an example. It's a kind of web programming technology.)

If the salesman doesn't fancy that approach, he can reach back into the Win-Win Game bag of tricks and try another ruse, such as 'I am wrong but it doesn't matter':

> "Oh, you didn't contact us? I'm sorry, I was honestly under the impression I was supposed to call you back. It's probably a bug in the database, but your name came up in connection with Java training - you sometimes source Java training for developers, don't you?"

Whatever route he takes, the salesman has achieved his goal. He has accessed the relevant decision-maker and has been able to

ask his questions.

Variations on a theme

Another possible way past an unhelpful secretary or switchboard 'blocker' is to use a variation on the Jargon Blitz. The salesman talks in such complicated terms that the 'blocker' feels daunted, and decides it's simpler to just put the salesman through. It might go something like this:

> *"Sorry, the person concerned does not take unsolicited sales calls. If you want to send us your sales literature, it will be given due consideration."*
>
> "Okay, thank you, I will. Just to make sure I send you the right information, can you tell me if you handle distribution of network processes with RMI or CORBA, and the necessary Java/C integration, or alternatively whether you mainly develop Java applications with UML and perhaps JCORBA/ EJB component design? Or should I ask someone else — it will only take a minute and then I'm gone."

Faced with this kind of syllable soup, many 'blockers' will rapidly decide that they have better things to do, and in any case the decision-maker is paid to deal with this kind of stuff...

> *"...er, you know what? I think you'd better have a quick word with our Mr. Brown - but he's very busy, so make it quick".*

This scenario of the unhelpful person trying to 'block' the sales call is relatively rare, and the suggestions made above might prove futile. Nonetheless, this first example serves to illustrate the general theme of this section. First, we analyse the context in terms of the Players and principal Goal, and then see if there is scope for cold reading techniques to play a part.

CR and cold calling (2): drilling for information

So our salesman has successfully gained access to the relevant decision-maker. In most cases, this leads to a short, simple Q & A session. Do you need what I'm selling? Are you likely to in the future? Thank you and goodbye.

Occasionally, however, the decision-maker is very unforthcoming or guarded, and declines to discuss what his company is doing or planning to do. The salesman may get a very vague response like this:

> *"We do occasionally have training requirements, but I'm not prepared to say more than that. If you just put some literature*

in the post..."

Our salesman's goal now is to drill for information. May I repeat for emphasis that cold reading techniques may be of no use whatsoever. On the other hand, they *may* work, and there's nothing to lose by trying. People find it a lot easier to *agree* with information than to *provide* it, so our salesman might try a variation on the Good Chance Guess, like this:

"I understand, and I'll certainly do that. But I mean, you obviously do run Java courses don't you? And your development department is, what, about 20 people, roughly speaking?"

This might, just possibly, unlock the information the sales person wants:

"Yes, well, about that. 15-20. We're re-structuring. But I really don't want to get into this..."

And the salesman has the information he wants. Another possible tactic is to combine a Good Chance Guess with an Incidental Question, like this:

"That's fine. I'll leave you in peace. It's just that I read you guys were expanding your R&D department, and you'd be strengthening your in-house Java capability. Sounds like pretty good news, doesn't it?"

If the buyer is very astute, and an effective 'blocker', he might see through this and dismiss it with another evasive response. On the other hand, he just might slip and give away more than he meant to:

"Well, it's fairly good news I suppose. I don't know about expanding the department, but we're certainly bringing the Java up to speed - and about time. But I really don't wish to say more about it."

And so he confirms the information without really meaning to. You may say this is not a very plausible dialogue. I can tell you that while it may not be typical, it certainly *is* possible to squeeze slivers of information out of prospects in this way, and I've done it in real life.

Summary

So far we have looked at 'cold calling', and seen how some cold reading techniques might help in a few special situations. Now let's consider a different context, when the salesman actually *meets* the prospective customer. The cold reading techniques we

have looked at in this book can help in two specific ways, the second being by far the more interesting:

- staging the sales meeting
- creating an illusion of knowledge

I'll deal with these one at a time.

CR and staging the sales meeting

When we looked at The Set Up for psychic readings, we dealt with subjects such as 'Meeting and Greeting', 'Encouraging co-operative interpretation' and 'Establishing psychic credentials'.

At the risk of stating the obvious, many of these techniques apply equally well to the context of a sales meeting, or indeed many other kinds of meetings. The techniques just need to be adapted slightly. Here's our new context summary:

> **Players:** Salesman, Prospect.
>
> **Context:** The start of an initial sales meeting.
>
> **Perception goal:** to be perceived as someone the buyer wants to do business with, someone genuinely helpful with good products/services

The very first Set Up technique was 'Meeting and Greeting', and I made special reference to 'mind scripts'. Psychic or salesman, the same basic rules apply. The better you are at making people feel welcome, and helping them to relax, the more successful you are likely to be. All the salesman needs is a suitable mindscript, like the example I gave before:

> "I deal fair, you deal fair, this is going to be very productive for both of us."

The next Set Up technique was 'Encouraging co-operative interpretation', and the salesman can use this too. He doesn't just want to deliver a one-sided sales 'pitch' to a passive, mute customer. He wants to get the customer talking about his needs, wants and aspirations, so that he (the salesman) can fine-tune his sales pitch and position his products as the 'best fit' solution.

In the psychic context, 'Encouraging co-operative interpretation' sounds something like this:

> "I won't necessarily always know exactly what the cards are trying to say. Sometimes it's not very clear, like looking through a mist, and the exact meaning will actually be clearer

to you than it is to me! So do bear that in mind, won't you?"

The salesman's version might go something like this:

"Obviously, I've done a bit of homework but I don't pretend to be an expert in your line of business. So perhaps first of all I could get a few details, and then perhaps I can talk through some options that I could put together. So, to start with, can I just ask..."

It's the same technique, designed to achieve an equivalent aim, but with slightly modified wording. However, this version is not as good as it could be. Everyone responds to two sounds more than any other: their name, and the word "you". And a progression from "you" to "we" is an neat subliminal aid to building good rapport. So an even better salesman's version would be:

"Perhaps first of all, Larry, you could talk a little bit about where you are right now, what you're trying to achieve. Then perhaps we can talk through some options we could put together for you. So, to start with, can you just tell me..."

Much better!

The next Set Up technique we looked at was 'Establishing an intimate atmosphere'. In the context of an initial sales meeting, this translates as 'Establishing an atmosphere conducive to selling'. If the salesman is visiting the customer, which is usually the case, then he obviously has limited control over 'atmosphere'. Even so, his cold reading sensibilities can come in handy. Some people, when they attend meetings, immediately plonk their briefcase down on the desk directly between themselves and the other person, and then proceed to lay out a notebook, laptop, pack of sales literature and so on. This creates a needless physical barrier, a 'psychological wall', between themselves and the person they are meeting. This inhibits rapport.

Hence our salesman puts as little as possible - not even a coffee cup! - directly between himself and the prospect. He may even use the simple visualisation technique of imagining a line going from the prospect's heart to his own, and ensuring as little as possible crosses this line.

If the salesman has invited the prospect to his own company's premises, then he obviously has more scope for 'Establishing an atmosphere conducive to selling'. He (or the company he works for) may even have created a dedicated sales room, specifically designed to help sales meetings go well. This is an excellent idea which, sadly, very few companies bother to implement. What sort

of factors might our salesman consider when creating such a room? Here are some suggestions:

- he eliminates distracting sights and sounds. Windows which let in daylight are fine. Not so fine are windows which provide a view of the open-plan office, including the accounts slob with his feet on the desk and people swearing at the photocopier. If there must be a phone, he ensures it is outgoing only.
- he positions the table or desk down the *side* of the room, not in the middle, so that people *have* to sit on the same side.
- he ensures the chairs are nice, comfortable ones that people can actually relax in properly.
- if sales literature, models, samples etc. must be available, he stores them (neatly) in a cupboard or shelf unit where they can be obtained when needed, rather than having them on permanent display. If they're not needed, they're just distracting clutter.
- he tries to get soft ambient lighting installed, without it being overly strange or spooky.
- he adds a few bits of decor (framed pictures, potted plants etc.) for colour, but nothing *too* interesting or distracting.

In many companies, the meeting room walls are covered with tributes to the company's heritage, achievements and success. The net result is usually an uninspiring collage of posters, bits of old exhibition stand signage, and fading press releases stuck in plastic frames.

If our salesman wants to be a little smarter, he selects just three key bits of information which he wants to lodge in the mind of every visiting prospect. On the meeting room walls, he places three posters or pieces of literature which convey these bits of information. For example, he might take a relevant extract from a recent bit of press coverage, get it properly enlarged and place it in a good-quality display frame. As a rule of thumb, he wants no more than 100 words of clear, readable text per item. When the visitor arrives, the salesman takes him into the room and gets the preliminaries out of the way. He then contrives to *leave the prospect alone for a minute* e.g. while he fetches the coffee. The prospect has absolutely nothing else to do except read the three key pieces of information, probably several times over. The salesman has begun to hypnotise his prospect while apparently doing nothing at all!

There is only one other thing which the dedicated sales room should contain, namely testimonials from satisfied customers, professionally laid out and printed in a clear, readable style. Nothing is quite so persuasive as evidence that (a) the company has *lots* of customers and (b) they are *satisfied* customers.

CR and the illusion of knowledge

So far, we have seen a few possible parallels between the psychic context and the sales context. It is fair to say these are quite limited in scope. We have yet to see how cold reading techniques could make a significant difference to our salesman's daily activity.

I believe there is one area where can cold reading techniques can make a *huge* difference: **helping the salesman to appear more well-informed than he really is.** Let me explain what I mean.

This is not the place for a lengthy dissertation on sales strategies and tactics (even though it's a subject dear to my heart). The simple point I want to make is that success in sales often comes down to personal rapport. A prospect is likely to buy if he feels that the salesman:

- knows a bit about his company
- understands his company's industry and market
- understands his (the prospect's) role, including the problems and pressures he faces
- shares his outlook, broadly speaking, and is someone he can relate to

In other words, we tend to buy from people we like, and we tend to like people we can relate to.

In an ideal world, every salesman would always be thoroughly well-informed about every prospect he meets. Sadly, we live in a less than ideal world, as I know from the fact that Jacqueline Bisset was born about a decade before me and we've never met. Even the most efficient salesman cannot always be as prepared and well-informed as he'd like to be.

When faced with this less than ideal situation, the salesman has two options. One is to be honest and say:

"I'm sorry, but I really know very little about what your company does."

Honesty is a virtue, and this *can* be a perfectly good way to get the prospect to start chatting.

The salesman's other option is to use cold reading techniques to convey the impression, or let the impression be formed, that he knows more than he really does.

You may find this repugnantly dishonest, and perhaps it is. Then again, the salesman might have legitimate reasons for pursuing this option. Maybe the prospective client is less than perfect (it happens), and would be unduly dismissive of the 'honest ignorance' plea and refuse the salesman a fair hearing. In a world which is occasionally shabby and disappointing, good salesmen sometimes trim the truth a little. I apologise to any of my readers who find themselves inconsolably disillusioned by this revelation.

Whatever the ethics involved, let us look at how cold reading techniques can help. Here's our new context summary:

Players: Salesman, Prospect.

Context: First face-to-face meeting, after the initial pleasantries.

Goal: to be perceived as someone who knows about the prospect's company, industry and markets, and understands the prospect's role and attendant difficulties.

Applying 'character' elements

It should come as no surprise that many 'character' elements apply to companies as well as they do to people. After all, you can discuss a company's birth and history, profile and reputation, triumphs and failures, hopes and ambitions, health and relationships (with its allies, competitors, employees and customers). These are all typical subjects in psychic readings, so if cold reading techniques work for people then they can work for companies.

Suppose the salesman wants to strike up a conversation about the prospect's industry, despite knowing very little about it. He could start like this:

"I was reading an article about your industry just the other day. Financial Times, I think. Basically, it was pointing out how segmented your industry can be. It was saying that in some sectors there's been quite a lot of change and fluctuation

- you know, restructuring, repositioning, talks of mergers, all that kind of thing - while other sectors have been really very calm, just ticking over much as expected".

If this sounds familiar, it should. It's the Rainbow Ruse, adapted from the psychic context to the sales context. In the psychic context, the 'information' is supposed to come from some esoteric field of study such as astrology or the tarot. This is not generally considered suitable for business meetings, so the salesman refers to some other plausible source, such as a newspaper's business section, the trade press or a 'friend who used to work in the industry'. He then takes two opposite characteristics which could apply to any industry, in this example 'change' and 'stasis', and joins them at the hip in classic Rainbow Ruse fashion.

The salesman can make up as many of these as he wants. All he needs are pairs of opposing adjectives can apply to a given industry. How about 'expanding' and 'contracting':

"Actually I was having lunch with an old colleague the other day. He once spent a bit of time in your industry. He was saying how there are times when some sectors really put on a bit of a spurt, seem to expand quite significantly, but that often that's against a broader picture of contraction. Obviously, regional factors play a part but still... it can be quite a complex picture, can't it?".

It's not much, but it will probably pass muster, and to some people it might even sound quite well-informed. At the very least, more well-informed than "I'm sorry, but I really know very little about what your company does."

Fine Flattery

Another element that can be readily transplanted from the psychic context to the sales context is Fine Flattery. Here are two examples of how it might sound:

"I have to say I think your pricing structures are very good. Getting the balance right between good value and profitability is never easy, but I think you've really judged it well - probably a bit better than most companies on your sector."

"You know, you may not be the biggest fish in the pond, but I do think you're one of the most innovative. I just find your whole company ethos to be much more forward-looking than most."

Psychic Credit

How can we adapt the Psychic Credit technique to fit a sales context? It's not as strange as it may sound. In the psychic context, the psychic - who supposedly has some kind of psychic gift - praises the client for having a little of the same talent. Translating this to the sales context, the salesman - who is supposedly good at selling - praises the prospect or the company for having some merit in this regard. It could sound like this:

> "In all honesty, speaking as a salesman myself, it seems to me you've got a very good sales operation here. You seem to set yourself pretty ambitious targets and work hard to get the numbers right. I'm impressed."

Or:

> "One thing I will say is that I really think your advertising works well for you. You probably get more out of your advertising spend than most of your competitors, and you've run some very effective campaigns. Seriously, I think you've really got the knack of using the media effectively."

Jacques Statement

The salesman can also apply the Jacques Statement to his purpose. In the psychic context, a Jacques Statement exploits the fact that most people's lives go through similar phases. Happily for the salesman, most industries also go through similar phases. The 'industrial' version might sound something like this:

> "I read an article on [your industry] not long ago. It mentioned the early days, the rather manic free-for-all when it was all about grabbing market share, getting a foot-hold, and how this gave way to a sort of 'consolidation' phase, when there had to be some settling down - you know, with the less successful brands going to the wall, the short-term opportunists pulling out, and the market slowly deciding who would survive for the long-haul.
>
> According to the article, this gave way to a lot of convergence in each main sector. Apparently you were all finding it harder and harder to achieve a distinctive presence in the market, so there was a fair bit of amalgamation. Usual story, the big fish merging into bigger fish to cut costs and squeeze margins — trying to guarantee survival, really — and just a few independents being left to cater for specialist 'niche' sectors".

I do not suggest our salesman would drone on at such length, of course, but this example illustrates how the Jacques Statement could apply to almost any sales context. The pattern (emergence,

consolidation, convergence, amalgamation + niche fragmentation) is one that holds good for most industries, most of the time.

An interesting difference between the psychic and the salesman is that whereas psychics always deal with adult people, salesmen sometimes deal with young and immature industries. So the tenses may need to change. If we were back in 1980, and the salesman was discussing the personal computer industry, then he would refer to all but the first phase in the *future* tense.

Barnum Statement

The Barnum Statement is another technique which applies as much to industries and markets as it does to people. Suppose our salesman wishes to say something faintly perceptive and intelligent about the prospect's industry. Here's one option:

> "Of course you're industry has had its ups and downs, hasn't it? I remember reading a fascinating article about it in Forbes. I don't recall the specifics, but the gist was that over the past two or three years there's been some really quite radical shifts in the patterns of consumer demand. In marketing terms, it's getting harder than ever to stay ahead of the curve. And apparently there's no sign of it slowing down. Did you read it?"

This is a Barnum Statement which could apply to just about any industry, at any time, and could pass muster as a reasonably intelligent comment from a thinking and well-informed mind. Another example:

> "I was talking to an old friend of mine at a conference last week. He used to work in [your industry], and he was saying it's generally the case that the business is there, if you know where to find it, but the problem is making it pay. Thin margins keep getting thinner, and you really have to go for the long-term to make it work. Perhaps that applies to some sectors more than others."

I can imagine more than a few business lunches where a Barnum Statement of this kind would at least light the conversational fire, and might give the prospect the distinct impression he's dealing with someone distinctly well-informed.

Applying 'facts' elements

The second group of elements, About facts and events', also provide plenty of fodder for our salesman. Consider the Good Chance Guess. In the psychic context, a Good Chance Guess is

one which, as its name implies, stands a good chance of being right. To use this technique in the sales context, the salesman needs only the most superficial awareness of the prevailing economic trends over the past five years. In good times money is sloshing around, which leads to hiring, profits, expansion, more risk-taking and product innovation. In bad times money is scarce, which leads to firing, reduced profits or losses, contraction, less risk-taking and lack of innovation. So if the economy has been generally 'good' for a while, a Good Chance Guess might sound something like this:

> "I was reading somewhere that your industry's seen quite a trend towards expansion over the past few years, hasn't it? Quite a lot of innovation here and there, people being more ready to take risks... that kind of thing. I should imagine it makes for quite interesting times!"

On the other hand, if the economy has been doing an impression of a combine harvester in freefall, this would be the way to go:

> "According to most of the reports I've looked at, your industry's been going through a bit of a tough time lately. I understand there's been something of a downturn in innovation, and margins are being squeezed hard."

In casual conversation, either of the above could pass for the output of an informed mind. Do bear in mind that with all of these techniques, being wrong is *not* a problem. We have seen how psychics play the Win-Win Game, so they can be right even when they are wrong. The salesman has more or less all the same options at his disposal.

Stat Fact / Trivia Stat

The Stat Fact and Trivia Stat both apply to industries and markets as much as they do to people. The psychic can search for statistics about people and society, or statistical trivia, and the salesman can do the same for any given industry or business. Indeed, there is a vast industry entirely devoted to churning out industrial and commercial statistics.

Folk wisdom

Psychics, as we have seen, make great use of Folk Wisdom. The salesman can do the same, but it just needs to be a different *type* of folk wisdom. Some examples:

> "As my old boss always used to say to me, it's not getting the money in that's the problem, it's keeping hold of some of it!

Don't you find that often the issue in your line of work?"

"Well, I guess your industry's like many others — you know half the advertising budget is wasted... but you just don't know which half!"

"What was that old saying about a bank manager... someone who lends you an umbrella and then wants it back when it starts raining! That's probably as true for companies in your market as for any other, don't you think?"

"I used to know a guy who worked in your line. He always said the business would run so much more easily without the [mild expletive, according to taste] customers!"

"I should think yours is the kind of industry where, as the saying goes, half the customers don't know what they want, and the other half know what they want but don't like it when they get it!"

And so on and so forth. It's nothing more than pithy conversational filler, but sometimes that's all a salesman needs.

Seasonal Touch

There are many seasonal factors which affect a typical company's operations. Here in the UK, for example, the tax year runs from April to April, and so many major budgeting decisions are scheduled to take effect from April onwards. This tends to be a time when new initiatives are announced, staff are hired or fired and re-organisations are implemented.

Another common seasonal factor, at least here in the UK, is the August holiday season. This is when most employees take their main annual holiday and so do most consumers, leading to depressed spending and activity all round (except in the holiday and tourism-related industries, obviously). September is therefore widely regarded as the month when things get back to normal, and is another very common time for the implementation of new plans, campaigns and initiatives.

Psychics try to extrapolate from relatively obvious seasonal factors to make educated guesses about a client's life. A salesman can do the same, remembering all the while to sound as if he's talking from knowledge:

"I'm glad we could meet up this soon. I didn't want to leave it much later because I should think you'll soon be getting a bit tied up with the rollout of your Fall campaigns."

Or on the phone:

"Tell you what, this probably isn't the ideal time for us to try and meet. Let's schedule the presentation for early next month, once you've got the seasonal rush out of the way and you can catch your breath again."

Applying 'prediction' elements

The fourth group of cold reading elements were to do with predicting the future. These too have their place in our salesman's repertoire. Let us consider a few simple examples.

Peter Pan Prediction

This is essentially the 'Tell them what they want to hear' prediction. Adapted to a business vocabulary, it could sound like this:

"I think your new line's going to do really well, actually. Based on where the market's going, I'd say you've come up with the right product at the right time. It's going to appeal to the so-called 'early-adopters', and that's what you need. They set the trend, everyone else follows suit."

Thus the salesman gives the impression of having a shrewd eye on relevant market trends, and at the same time endears himself to the prospect with his confident optimism.

Pollyanna Pearls

The basic structure of the Pollyanna Pearl is to pick one theme, and promise that recent rain will give way to future sunshine. Adapted to the sales context:

"I gather you've had problems over the past 12-18 months getting the top-end technical people you need? I think it's been pretty much the same for everyone. Mind you, I think the situation's going to ease a little. There's new blood coming in, plus a lot of churn in the industry. And frankly some of the big players got themselves more people than they really need, so I wouldn't be surprised if one or two find themselves suddenly available."

Again, while this might not be much, it stands a fair chance of sounding like the musings of an informed mind. And in terms of building god rapport, that's all that really matters.

Retail Selling

In this section I have focused on business-to-business selling, rather than retail sales. Nonetheless, it should be fairly self-

evident that many of these techniques would work just as well in the retail context. Consider any retail outlet where the sales staff spend their time talking to customers, discussing their needs and helping them to pick and choose. The customer will be more inclined to buy if he feels the sales assistant

- understands, and empathises with, his needs and preferences
- can relate to his good and bad experiences with competitors' products
- has a good working knowledge of what's on the market, and can relate to the customer's difficulties evaluating the various deals on offer
- sincerely has the customer's interests at heart, and only wants to sell something if it's right for him

In other words, it largely comes down to the same basic goals: building good rapport, and managing to sound perceptive and well-informed.

This concludes our look at the possible application of cold reading techniques to a sales context. There is no shortage of sales gurus hyping their own blend of top tips and winning ways. Much of it is snake-oil, and I have no desire to add to the scrap-heap of fads and mythologies concerning sales technique. My only aim has been to offer some ideas, and highlight some possibilities. Some sales professionals may feel there is very little mileage in any of the suggestions made in this section. Others may feel differently, and might even feel inclined to pursue these ideas in greater depth.

Cold Reading and romance

Having looked at the psychic context and the sales context, we can now look at cold reading techniques as they might apply in a romantic context.

This section is not intended as a contribution to the ever-growing, ever-amusing 'seduction secrets' industry. There are already countless books, websites and manuals devoted to 'sure-fire' seduction techniques, so I doubt there's anything left to add. Instead, this relatively brief section is intended to explore parallels between factors that help a psychic reading (or a sales meeting) to go well, and those which can assist a romantic date to go well.

I've included this section for two main reasons. The first is that a journalist, reviewing an earlier edition of this book, once remarked that much of it read like a guide to 'What every woman wants'. His point was that many men could probably borrow a few good ideas from the ways in which psychics cultivate good rapport with their (mainly female) clients. I thought this was quite an interesting comment, but at the same time I felt the subject warranted a cautious approach. In my view, any man who thinks he knows 'what every woman wants' hasn't met that many women. He may be comfy in his smug cocoon of delusions, but he is probably the unwitting subject of much mirth and amusement among his female acquaintances.

The second reason is simply that I get asked about this subject a great deal, and not just by other men. More than a few of my female friends, having perused earlier editions of this book, have shared their speculations about how cold reading techniques might play a part in relationships and relationship management. In fact three female friends have helped me to piece this short section together. If anything herein is deemed accurate and insightful, it can be credited to their assistance.

So far we have looked at two contexts:

- Psychic and Client
- Salesman and Prospect/Customer

Let us begin with a new context summary. I could simply designate our players as Man and Woman, but that lacks charm. I shall call them Fred and Ginger.

Players: Fred, Ginger.

Context: A romantic dinner for two, or similar social

occasion.

Perception goal: Fred wants to be perceived by Ginger as a decent, likeable, interesting and engaging man in whose company she can relax and enjoy herself. Hopefully, Ginger will decide she'd like to see more of Fred (howsoever that phrase may be interpreted).

So, which cold reading (CR) techniques might Fred usefully deploy in this context?

CR and dating basics

It should be fairly obvious that Fred can use many of the Set Up techniques to his advantage. If these techniques can help a psychic reading or sales meeting get off to a good start, why not a romantic dinner for two? All the points made under 'Meeting and Greeting' are about giving someone a warm welcome, and helping them to feel relaxed, at ease and receptive to whatever you have to say. What more could Fred want? One thing he can use is a suitable mind script, such as:

"I like you, I'm the kind of man you like, and we're going to have a great time"

Another Set Up technique is 'Encouraging co-operative interpretation'. In a romantic context, this translates as 'Encouraging a sense of sharing'. In other words, Fred should take care to convey the idea that this is a shared evening, a shared conversation, a shared discovery of whatever he and Ginger have (or don't have) in common. This helps Fred to avoid two extremes which Ginger will find tiresome: the man who wants to do *all* the talking, and the man who hardly does *any* talking.

Next we have 'Establishing an intimate atmosphere'. What could be more relevant to a romantic context? If Fred wishes Ginger to enjoy a pleasant, romantic evening in his company, he should at least select a venue with suitable ambience. Of course, 'suitable' is a subjective term. Some men would choose a local diner catering chiefly to the long-distance road haulage industry. I'd suggest this is generally a poor choice. Some men would choose the dining room of the Hotel Bel Air in Los Angeles. I'd suggest this is the *perfect* choice.

In the psychic context, when we looked at 'intimate atmosphere', I mentioned that some psychics are careful to use a slightly gentler, more relaxed tone of voice than normal. This can be a

very effective way to create an air of intimacy, and Fred should take note. Queen Victoria apparently complained of Prime Minister Gladstone that "He speaks to me as if I was a public meeting". It's a common mistake. Although there are notable exceptions on both sides, mens voices are typically louder and more brash than those of women. If Fred uses a rather over-bearing tone of voice, this is not very pleasant for Ginger. If he uses a slightly gentler voice than usual (emphasis on 'slightly'), this can help to foster a more relaxed conversational ambience.

Another relevant Set Up technique is 'Setting the client at ease'. In the psychic context, this involved being sensitive to any signs of concern or anxiety that could impede the success of the reading. Adapted to the romantic context, Fred might like to bear in mind that just because he is comfortable it doesn't necessarily follow that Ginger is too. Many women are more sensitive to ambient temperature than men are. While Fred may think everything is fine, Ginger may be feeling cold or aware of a nearby draught, but unwilling to say anything. Good for Fred if he spots this, and insists they be re-seated so that Ginger feels more comfortable.

CR and conversational themes

In the psychic context, we looked at seven Principal Themes around which most readings are built. The psychic aims to discover which themes are important to the client, and focuses on them. This is also a good strategy in a romantic context. Fred may have all kinds of interesting things to say about the latest TV shows and movies, but if Ginger just isn't into 'Popular Culture' then she'll soon get bored. He may be a veritable goldmine of sporting facts and figures, but if Ginger just couldn't care less, he's wasting his time and hers. It's a good idea for Fred to quickly zone in on those subjects dear to Ginger's heart, and to allow them to govern the conversation.

CR and building rapport

We have already seen that cold reading techniques can help to establish rapport. In *any* conversation, if the other person feels that you understand them, and that there is plenty of room for agreement, they gain a sense of convergence and bonding. In other words, good rapport. If the other person feels that you do *not* understand them, and every conversational thread seems to fragment into disagreement, they gain no sense of convergence

and bonding, and are unlikely to enjoy the encounter. Judicious use of some cold reading techniques might therefore help Fred to enhance his rapport with Ginger. A few examples should illustrate the point.

Consider the Rainbow Ruse, as applied to Fred's conversation with Ginger. Suppose that Ginger has been chatting about some of her work-related trials and tribulations. At a natural point in the conversation, Fred might offer this kind of feedback:

> "It does sound very frustrating. From what you say, I get the impression you're usually quite calm, not the sort of person to over-react. But it seems from time to time all this pressure does tend to bring out your less calm side. I bet you can be get quite, um, *demonstrative* on occasion".

There you have it, a classic Rainbow Ruse which harnesses 'calm' and 'manic' into the same description. Yet a statement like this, offered at the right time, could seem the epitome of perceptive insight. And insight is a cornerstone of rapport.

Fred might also use a touch of Fine Flattery. The specifics will obviously depend on the flow of conversation. Suppose that Ginger has been talking about some of the pros and cons of her job, and the way some people are rather less reliable than they should be. Fred might say something like:

> "It must drive you mad at times! I mean, from what you've said, I get the impression you're quite conscientious in your own way - you know, if you say you'll do something, you *will* actually *do* it! I imagine people find you quite dependable."

It's something and nothing - just a mild compliment offered in passing - but it may register with Ginger, and it doesn't harm Fred's chances of being considered quite perceptive. Of course, women can spot insincerity a mile away, so Fred should beware of issuing hollow compliments which show up on Ginger's 'creep' radar.

The Jacques Statement is especially applicable to a romantic context. As we have seen, this technique is based on the similar 'life phases' which we all pass through. Given that people generally date within their own age group, it is probably the case that Fred and Ginger's lives, in recent years, will have been passing through similar phases. For example, they might both be at the age where they have made the transition from their first 'fresh out of school' job to a second job which pays better but carries greater responsibilities. If Fred thinks about the problems, challenges, highs and lows he himself has felt in recent years, he

can safely assume Ginger has had some of the same feelings, broadly speaking. It can't hurt to occasionally mention these parallels. The 'me too' sentiment is very good for rapport.

Fred can also make good use of Barnum Statements to instil a sense of rapport and understanding:

> "I guess you sometimes feel you don't ask for much, but a little credit and recognition wouldn't hurt".
>
> "You know, I get the impression you can be quite self-critical at times."
>
> "Seems to me you're not the sort to just believe whatever people say. I think you're a bit more independent than that. You form your own conclusions".

These are just ordinary Barnums given a lick of conversational paint. On the printed page, they can seem rather trite, as Barnums tend to do. However, these kinds of comments may well encourage Ginger to conclude she is with someone who can appreciate her for who she is, understands her, and can relate to her.

Presentational Points

In the context of a psychic reading, I listed a number of Presentational Points. These all apply to Fred's evening with Ginger just as much as they do to psychic readings. For example, the first point was all to do with cultivating feedback and putting it to good use. Some of the key points were:

- maintaining a relaxed, intimate mood
- including response prompts
- asking open questions
- using eye contact
- noting body language cues

If Fred learns how to cultivate feedback in these various ways, and to use it, the chances are Ginger will regard him as more than averagely attentive and considerate.

Another of the presentational points concerned 'Sensory empathy'. As a broad generalisation, men tend to talk about what they *think* whereas women talk about what they *feel.* Although it's a small point, this can impede the development of good rapport. If Fred therefore takes care to express himself in terms of feelings rather than thoughts, this won't do any harm, and could subtly

give their rapport a helping hand.

'Keeping it clear' is another very simple and yet significant presentational point. Fred's sparkling conversational repertoire is no good if Ginger finds it hard to understand him. Rapport is a subtle and elusive quality, and there are few clear-cut indicators. However, it is safe to say that if Fred provokes these responses:

"I'm sorry, can you say that again?"

"I'm sorry, I don't understand"

then his 'clarity' could use a little work.

Ethics

Before concluding this section, a brief word concerning the ethics involved. If Fred knowingly employs these techniques as described, should we brand him a false, conniving, deceptive scoundrel?

It's a matter of opinion, but my own view is that this surely depends on Fred's character. If he really *is* decent, likeable, attentive etc., then you could say he is simply trying to ensure his good qualities shine through. If, on the other hand, he is actually a sorry piece of time-wasting slime, then yes, his motives are deceptive and reprehensible. He deserves to endure cruel and unusual punishments - such as meeting women who play the same games.

This concludes our brief look at the potential application of cold reading techniques to a romantic context. There is probably a great deal more that could be said, but it would fall beyond the scope of this book. I feel I should add that while cold reading techniques may well have a 'romantic' role, I am wary of exaggerating their significance. When all is said and done, Ginger will always know whether she is with Prince Charming or King Creep, Mr. Right or 'Mister, forget it'. And all the cold reading skills in the world won't make any difference!

Cold reading and criminal interrogation

I receive a lot of correspondence about cold reading from all over the world, and most of it is very interesting. On more than one occasion, police officers and other law enforcement officials have written to me about the possible application of cold reading techniques to the interrogation of suspects in criminal cases. I find this an intriguing idea, and during a visit to New York I had the privilege of discussing it further with Peter Kougasian, Assistant DA for the County of New York (and a fine magician too). Peter suggested I consult 'Criminal Interrogation and Confessions' by Inbau, Reid and Buckley, which is a standard textbook on the subject, and this proved to be an excellent recommendation. For one thing, it's a beautifully well-written book, and I'm a fan of good writing wherever I find it. I also found the contents absolutely fascinating.

Most of what follows is based on Part 1 of this book, 'Interrogation Tactics and Techniques'. My copy is the hardback third edition, published in 1986 by Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore. For brevity, I shall refer to the authors as IRB.

I am going to explore two separate subjects.

First, I will look at some striking similarities between standard interrogation practice, as described by IRB, and the cold reading techniques we've looked at in this book. These chiefly pertain to setting up ideal conditions for the interrogation. I hope you find these comparisons as intriguing as I do.

Secondly, I will look at how some cold reading techniques might apply to interrogations in ways which are *not* already standard, hence not covered by IRB. These chiefly pertain to the interrogator giving the impression he knows more than he does.

Contextual parallels

Many practices which IRB say are standard, or ought to be, parallel those of the professional psychic. Some may seem a little obvious, others less so.

For example, there is a section in the book entitled 'Suggestions for setting up the interrogation room'. Most of these could apply equally well to setting up a room for psychic readings or sales meetings. Among other points, the authors suggest that the room should establish a sense of privacy, be devoid of distractions, have appropriate lighting (neither excessive nor glaring), minimise

noise from outside and be arranged so there is no table or furniture between interrogator and suspect.

Interestingly, IRB suggest that someone other than the interrogator should escort the suspect into the interrogation room, and announce that Mr. X [name of the interrogator] will be along soon. They recommend this purely as a way to raise the perceived status of the interrogator. This echoes the points made concerning 'Establishing psychic credentials', 'Establishing the belief system' and otherwise raising the psychic's perceived status.

In another section, IRB describe the 'Attitude and General Conduct of the Interrogator'. They mention points such as keeping the mood calm but focused, minimising distractions, avoiding any actions or gestures which could seem hostile or confrontational, and avoiding behaviour which could either convey anxiety or promote it (e.g. the interrogator should avoid pacing round the room). The authors also say the interrogator should use language that conforms to that used and understood by the suspect. There are many parallels here with The Set Up and Presentational Points (e.g. 'Setting the client at ease', 'Keeping it clear' and 'Keeping it folksy').

Earlier in this book I touched on the subject of 'body language'. Chapter 5 of 'Criminal Interrogation' contains extensive sections on 'The value of direct observation and evaluation of behaviour symptoms' and 'Evaluation of verbal and non-verbal responses'. These sections cover body language and several other forms of non-verbal communication. The authors go into considerable detail, although they are solely concerned with non-verbal cues which might help to sort truth from lies. They are careful to emphasise that body language and non-verbal cues are far from perfect indicators:

> "Although behaviour symptoms are very helpful in differentiating truth from deception, they are not to be considered determinative of the issue. This is also true with respect to any diagnostic effort respecting human behaviour. Moreover, even when behaviour symptoms seem to the interrogator to be absolute in their indications, they should be evaluated only as *tentative indicators* of truth or deception."

[pg. 54, emphasis in the original]. The authors even include a lengthy section specifically devoted to 'Factors that may lead to misinterpretation of behaviour symptoms'.

The book contains a fascinating reference to so-called 'baiting questions'. In its simplest form, a baiting question lures the suspect into confirming a key fact by shifting the focus on to a separate issue. For example, if the interrogator says:

"Your car was seen in front of the house"

the suspect may challenge the interrogator to back up this direct accusation, and the interrogator may have no way of doing so. Or the suspect may simply deny it, which can only promote confrontation. A baiting question would go like this:

"Can you think of any reason why Mary's neighbour would say she saw your car in front of her apartment?"

[Examples paraphrased from the original] As the authors explain, this is much safer and less confrontational, since the interrogator is not making any direct accusation. Moreover, the suspect - while offering some response about what the neighbour said - may inadvertently give some clue as to whether his car was, or was not, actually there. Thus the baiting question is effectively a way of asking a question ("Was your car present at the house?") without seeming to do so. Psychics, of course, do this all the time, using such techniques as 'The Incidental Question' and 'The Veiled Question'. There are limits to this comparison. In the psychic context, the psychic is *obliged* to seem as if she is giving information because that's what the client is paying for. The police interrogator is under no such obligation, and his usual stance is that of someone simply trying to get at the facts to sort things out. As such, he is perfectly entitled to ask direct questions. Nonetheless, the interrogator can sometimes find it useful to disguise the fact that he is hunting for information (or, more precisely, to disguise *which* facts he's actually interested in).

IRB discuss a second form of baiting question. This is intended to strongly imply that a given fact is already known or established. Hence, instead of asking the suspect:

"Do you own a diary"

the interrogator will ask:

"Where is your diary now?"

[Examples paraphrased from the original]. This version implies that the police already know the suspect has a diary, so there is no point in denying it. Or at least, admission / denial ceases to be the issue.

The authors mention other ways in which the interrogator can appear to know more than he does. For example, they suggest that the interrogator should prepare an evidence case folder, or at least a simulation of one, which he can look through at judicious moments during the interview as if it contains detailed and incriminating material - even if it actually contains very little.

In one section of the book there is a truly delightful example of a deceptive technique used to imply that the interrogator has already obtained a confession from the suspect's accomplice. I will paraphrase from the original.

The interrogator is fairly sure two suspects, A and B, committed a burglary but neither will confess. He leaves both in a waiting room where a secretary is busy typing. The interrogator takes A into the interview room, and gets nowhere (as expected). He returns A to the waiting room, and takes B into the interview room. After a suitable interval, the interrogator asks the secretary to come to the interview room. The secretary is in on the deception, and knows what to do. While A looks on, she sharpens a pencil or two, flips open a clean page on her shorthand pad, and goes into the interview room. After another plausible interval, she returns to the waiting room and starts apparently typing up her notes (she is in fact typing anything at all or complete nonsense). Occasionally she asks a nearby officer such details as how A spells his surname. Having apparently typed, proofed and corrected her notes, the secretary takes a printed version back to the interview room and then resumes her normal duties back in the waiting room. A has had a full view of the whole charade! After 15-20 minutes, B is taken from the interview room to some other part of the station. The interrogator returns to the waiting room, escorts A to the interview room, and says, "So, what do you have to say for yourself?". A, under the impression that B has confessed, also confesses!

CR and interrogation

So far I have cited some standard criminal interrogation techniques, as described by Inbaue, Reid & Buckley (IRB), which echo some aspects of psychic cold reading practice. I now want to suggest some *other* ways - not yet standard - in which cold reading techniques *might* be applied to criminal interrogation. Specifically, ways in which the interrogator can seem to know more than he really does, which just might help his interrogation. These are hypothetical possibilities only, and some may strike you

as far-fetched. I think they are worth exploring nonetheless. I should make it clear that I am not writing from any first-hand experience. Here's our context summary.

> **Players:** Interrogator, Suspect.
>
> **Context:** An interrogation related to a criminal investigation.
>
> **Perception goal:** for the interrogator to be perceived by the suspect as knowing more than he really does about the crime and the suspect's role.

It seems to meet that some of the 'character' elements could play a part in this context. To begin with, a well-crafted Rainbow Ruse might possibly undermine a suspect's confidence:

> "I think I understand where you're at right now. There are times you feel sure you can sit this out, or talk your way out of it, and it's all going to go away. And there are other times when you're not quite so sure. Times when you can't keep some doubt from creeping in. Maybe someone else will say something to help us. Maybe there's more evidence than you realise. Maybe it's not going to be so easy after all. That's what I think's going on — first you feel sure and then maybe not so sure."

It's just a standard Rainbow Ruse, albeit adapted to suit the context, but like every other Rainbow Ruse it's likely to sound perceptive, insightful and 'close to home'. It *could* make the suspect feel the interrogator knows him very well, and knows a lot more about the situation than he is letting on. All of which might make him more receptive to the usual invitations to 'clear this thing up'.

What I have called Sugar Lumps could also play a part:

> "Let me tell you something. I've seen a lot of guys in this room, and I'll be the first to give you credit. You're good. You're very good. Very cool. If I were in your position, I honestly don't think I'd manage to keep so cool about it, and I doubt many other people would either. You're very focused, and I respect you for that. And that's why I want you to do yourself the best favour you can, and help us straighten this thing out."

A Greener Grass statement could also give the suspect the uncomfortable feeling that the interrogator can 'read him like a book':

> "You know what? I'll bet you sometimes think what it would be like to make all this go away. I mean all this running around, trying to keep one step ahead. It's not much of a life, is it? You

know, there are plenty of guys your age, with your background, they're never in here, never in this situation. They do a day's work, they get a day's pay, they have their ups and downs like everyone else. But they're never down here. We don't take up their time because they don't take up ours. I'm pretty sure you've thought about this. Now, we can sort this whole thing out, and you can tell us what really happened, and maybe you can think about being one of those guys who never have to come in here."

In similar vein, the interrogator might use a Jacques Statement to apparently describe the suspect's life story:

"Look, I can understand how someone like you — basically a decent, regular guy - can get into these situations. It happens all the time. At first it's just a few short-cuts here and there, a few ways to make a buck. So you bend a few rules now and again, so what? Everyone does it, right? Then you get a bit more ambitious. You get in deeper. You know you're good at not getting caught, but it's funny how one thing leads to another. Things get out of hand. There are some near-misses. It gets harder to keep one step ahead. You're a player, sure, but the game gets tougher every time. And now you're here.

You're basically a decent guy who just wasn't getting the breaks. You start small, but it all spirals out of control. And now you've got a choice. You can carry on, running and hiding and watching your back, worrying in case you make one small slip. Or, you can sort this thing out now, draw a line and put it behind you."

Some cold reading techniques might help the interrogator imply he knows more about the crime than he really does. Consider the Fuzzy Fact, for example, in relation to a burglary:

"We're piecing things together, and I really think you should help us sort this out. We've heard about the problems with the money, and we know you were given some information that turned out... well, let's just say it wasn't quite as accurate as you would have liked."

Or how about a Good Chance Guess:

"We don't yet have all the details. That's why we'd like your help to sort this thing out. For example, we have some information about the arrangements you made to handle all the money afterwards, and we know that you ran into some, well... let's just call them complications. It's tough when people sometimes let you down and don't keep their end of the deal. Can we at least get that part of it straight?"

These are just hypothetical examples, and I'm sure someone with first-hand experience of interrogation could word them better.

Nonetheless, I hope these few examples suggest that an interrogator could, at the very least, throw a suspect off balance, plant some seeds of doubt, and convey the distinct impression of knowing more than he really does.

In the psychic context, I listed several techniques used for 'Extracting information. The psychic uses these techniques to sound like she is giving information when in fact she is doing her best to extract it. As I have already noted, the interrogator doesn't need to disguise his tactics to this extent, since the suspect knows he is trying to obtain information. Nonetheless, he may often want

- to imply that he knows more than he really does
- to disguise the true focus of his questions, or
- to make his questions less confrontational and hence easier to answer

Some of the 'Extracting information' techniques may assist these aims. For a first example, consider the Incidental Question. Suppose the point at issue is whether or not a given suspect was ever present at the crime scene. The Incidental Question would go something like this:

> "Now, whether or not you had anything to do with the break-in, we know you have a good knowledge of that neighbourhood, and people say you had been to the house a few times. I think you can understand why they'd say that, yes?"

It sounds like a statement, but in fact it's just another way of asking a question. Here's another example. Suppose a knife was used in a crime, and the interrogator thinks the suspect owns or owned the knife in question.

> "Okay, maybe you were involved, maybe not, but let's just leave that to one side. For now, I just want to clarify this business with the knife. We know from talking to people that you used to own one just like it. That much makes sense to you, doesn't it?"

The Russian Doll, you will recall, is a question with several shells of possibility. The interrogator might make use if it like this:

> "I'd like to at least clear up one detail. It's about the knife. Now, at some point you owned it, or at least you *had* it even if it wasn't actually yours. Or you had one just like it, or one that was so similar that the people we've spoken to are getting a bit confused. So, which is it?"

Yet another possibility is the Veiled Question. Here's an example where the point at issue is whether or not the suspect knows the area where the crime was committed.

> "Now, we've had our people knocking on doors and checking this out, and we've established that you know the neighbourhood, or at least you've been there a few times to see some people you know, or some guys you deal with. Which is it? Do you know the place, or just go there a few times for some reason?"

The interrogator can also use the Vanishing Negative to seem like he is in possession of more facts than he really is, like this:

> "We know the knife belonged to John. You didn't used to hang out with John, did you?"

Whether the suspect says yes or no, the interrogator can make it seem like he knew as much, or assumed it. In fact, he's asking questions and obtaining feedback without seeming to.

Legality

You may be interested, as I was, in the legality of using such deceptive techniques in the course of a criminal interrogation. IRB deal with this point in admirable detail. Obviously I cannot reproduce all of the relevant legal arguments here. In essence, it seems that interrogators *can* legally employ deceptive ruses within certain limits. As the authors explain:

> "The Supreme Court of the United States in 'Frazier .v. Cupp' recognised the essentiality of interrogation practices involving trickery or deceit, and approved of them" / "the deceit must not be of such a nature as to 'shock the conscience' of the court or the community, nor can it be one that is apt to induce a false confession".

I have not found out if there is any more recent ruling which overrides this one.

Curtain Down

This brings to a close the Full Facts Book of Cold Reading. I hope that you found it interesting and worthwhile.

If you want to get in touch, or contribute to the Online Supplement, please visit my website (www.ianrowland.com) and use the email link.

May I once again thank all of those who helped to produce this book, and most of all I would like to thank **you** for reading it.

Ian Rowland

October 2002, London

Pass it on!

Do you like this book? If you do, I want to ask you to help me tell other people about it.

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Do you contribute to a magazine? Why not write a short review of the book, and mention how to order a copy?

Ever call phone-ins and shows about psychics? See if you can squeeze in a mention of this book! Remember, if people just know how to spell 'Rowland', they can easily find my website.

Are you a student or teacher? Maybe this book could be a 'set text' for a course module, or provide the basis for some interesting research and practical social experiments!

THANK YOU!

Ian Rowland

www.ianrowland.com

Appendix

Note 1: Market for psychic readings

The estimate of '1.4 to 2 billion dollars' was cited in 'The Skeptical Inquirer' Vol. 22, No.3 May/June 1998. Published by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), Buffalo, New York.

Note 2: Deception and entertainment

In 'Three things this book is not about / Magicians and their methods' I made a distinction between deception used purely for entertainment purposes and deception used *outside* the sphere of entertainment. It is only fair to note that not every practitioner of the deceptive arts recognises this distinction, or would draw the same boundaries. Among the community of performers given to simulating 'psychic' demonstrations, there are many shades of opinion about claims and disclaimers but no real consensus.

Some feel obliged to offer emphatic denials of any 'real' psychic ability, and to emphasise that their routines are entertaining deceptions, no more no less. Others encourage the belief that they possess authentic psychic gifts. Many choose a middle-ground policy of 'nothing stated, nothing denied'.

All one can really say is that each performer makes his own choice, and each choice has its consequences. Personally, I do think it's risky to take the 'this is for real' route, since it tends to attract some *very* strange people and weird requests.

Note 3: Making people like you

In the section on 'Meeting and greeting' I referred to Nicholas Boothman's book, 'How to Make Anyone Like You in 90 Seconds Or Less'. At the time of writing this is available from the usual high street or online sources. The cover blurb says, 'Learn to read body language, synchronize behaviour and make warm, meaningful connections. For all occasions, business, social and personal'. I have reservations about some of the material, but I think it's a fine introduction to non-verbal communication and techniques for promoting good rapport.

Note 4: Sheehy's 'Passages'

Under 'Jacques statements' I referred to Gail Sheehy's book 'Passages', which I recommend highly. Sheehy has in fact published several titles in similar vein. 'New Passages' is advertised as a sequel reflecting the social and cultural shifts since the original was published, and I think it's just as valuable. She has also published 'Passages for Men', but I have not read this.

Note 5: Barnum experiments

In the section devoted to 'Barnum statements' I mentioned that psychologists have studied the Barnum Effect. Summaries of at least two such studies appear in Ray Hyman's article, 'Cold Reading: How to Convince Strangers that You Know All About Them' which was published in The Zetetic, Spring/Summer 1977'. Among other studies, Hyman refers to:
- Forer, B.R. 1949. 'The Fallacy of Personal Validation: A Classroom Demonstration of Gullibility.' Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 44: 118-23.
- Snyder, C.R. and R.J. Shenkel 1975, 'The Barnum Effect', Psychology Today 8: 52:54.

'The Zetetic' was the original name of the journal which changed its name to 'The Skeptical Inquirer'.

In the previous editions of this book, I wrote that I did not know the origin of the term 'Barnum Statement'. Julien Nino got in touch to provide what may well be the answer. He sent me an extract from 'The American Psychologist', Vol 11., No.6, June 1956. In an article entitled 'Wanted - A Good Cookbook', Paul E Meehl writes, "Many psychometric reports bear a disconcerting resemblance to what my colleague Donald G. Paterson calls 'personality description after the manner of P.T. Barnum'. I suggest - and I am quite serious - that we adopt the phrase 'Barnum effect' to stigmatize those pseudo-successful clinical procedures in which personality descriptions from tests are made to fit the patient largely or wholly by virtue of their triviality".

Note 6: 'Sherlock Strategy' Guessing Game answers

In the 'Sherlock Strategy' section I described some clues which a cold reader might exploit using the 'Sherlock Strategy'. Here are some possible interpretations. Feel free to disagree!

1. Client plays the violin or viola, and has done for some time.

Years of holding the violin against the neck can result in a very distinctive patch of discolouration on the neck. Violinists may also have distinctive groove marks along the pads of their left fingertips caused by the violin strings. Note that whether a violinist is naturally left- or right-handed, they ALL play the same way (violin in left hand, bow in right).

2. Client has been buying cosmetics and testing different shades on the back of her hand.

If the marks are on her left hand she is right-handed, and vice-versa. Foundation, concealer, eye-shadow and so on can all be tested in this way.

3. Client has recently visited a dress-maker, to have something made or altered.

In a dress-maker's or outfitter's shop, it is common practice to have the customer take off her shoes and stand on a small raised platform wearing the item to be altered. The dress-maker, while pinning the material to the correct length as required, may use a marking device which puffs a faint horizontal line of chalk on to the material.

4. Client works as a hairdresser, or some other trade which involves handling scissors or shears.

5. It is a relatively safe bet that the client has similar marks on her back.

An experienced cold reader might find it interesting that the birthmark has neither been concealed with cosmetics nor surgically removed. Perhaps the client is a very secure, well-balanced person lacking egotism or vanity. Or she may crave cosmetic surgery but be unable to afford it. It is very likely that someone with this kind of birthmark was instructed from an early age about dermatological care, and so she may be a little more medically aware than most people.

6. It could mean nothing at all - lots of people chew gum just because they like to.

Alternatively, it may indicate one of several possible traits. If she is a considerate smoker, she may use mints or gum to freshen her breath before meetings. The client may also use mints or gum if she is fond of very spicy food, or if she has ever been told (or suspects) she has a bad breath problem.

7. Client has been chalking the tip of a cue, as used to play pool, billiards or snooker.

This is hardly a sure-fire indication, and not a very likely one either. Not many people would schedule a psychic reading after a game of pool! Nonetheless, it may be worth bearing in mind, especially since pool is (at the time of writing) one of the fastest-growing recreations and one enjoyed by both men and women.

8. This clue gives rise to at least two interesting possibilities.

One is that the client reads a newspaper which, being printed using older types of web offset printing and inks, leaves ink smudges on the hands as it is being read. The paper can also leave marks on outer clothing as it is being carried or placed in one's coat pocket. In England, where I live, some daily papers are sufficiently 'wet' to make this quite a serious nuisance. Other daily papers use better printing, or better inks, and never give rise to this problem. This difference makes it possible to guess which newspaper the client reads. In class-ridden and class-obsessed England, this can provide clues as to the client's educational level, political leanings and inclination to peer at photos of semi-naked women over breakfast.

Another possibility is that the client works with the kinds of office printers or copiers that require toner cartridges to be changed once in a while. As many readers will know, toner is a magical substance with properties baffling to conventional science. Though in theory encased within a sealed plastic replacement unit, toner can find its way on to any clean surface or clothing within a five foot radius. It is also well-documented that toner may refuse to attach itself to paper (hence 57 attempts to print a simple letter) but will smear itself into a clean shirt or suit with startling rapidity.

9. Client has recently used a rowing exercise machine.

If you have ever used one of these machines, you will know that it is possible (depending on your anatomy) to lightly chafe the insides of your arms on the sides of your knees with every rowing stroke. This can leave a distinctive patch of reddish or roughened skin. If you think this is rather a useless 'Sherlock' clue, I agree with you. Not many people go for a psychic reading straight from their gym session.

This concludes the 'Sherlock Strategy' Guessing Game. You may think that some or all of these examples are silly and impractical. I would tend to agree, which is why I made it clear the quiz was

only presented as a bit of fun. These kinds of clues can be fun to make up or quiz your friends about, but their practical application to skilled cold reading is perhaps more limited than some sources suggest.

Note 7: Probability and disasters

In the section on Public Predictions, I wrote 'The longer it has been since the last major air crash made headlines, the more likely it is that one will occur soon'. This prompted correspondence from several readers concerning probability theory. Chief among these was Alan Jackson, with whom I enjoyed some very fascinating correspondence. Alan's main point was that if an event is truly random, in the strict sense of the word, then the laws of probability tell us nothing about whether it will or will not occur at a specific time (this is what it means to be 'random').

This point may run counter to some people's intuition and 'common sense'. Some people who play roulette feel that if 'red' has not come up for a long time, it is some how 'more likely' to come up on the next spin. This is not true. The chances of red coming up remain 50/50, and previous spins makes no difference. If one regards airline crashes and similar disasters as being truly random events, then what has occurred in the past makes no difference to the probability of another such crash occurring soon.

However, it can be argued that some kinds of disasters are not *strictly* random. It can be argued that major airline crashes are the consequence of what must be relatively constant factors within the airline industry (operator error, parts failing, technological glitches etc.). If this is granted, then one can calculate the average number of major crashes which occur over a given period of time, and then look for statistical deviations. If the actual number is measurably below average for a given period, then an 'airline crash' prediction is more likely to come true than at other times. The further the deviation from an established average, the more likely it is that the prediction will come true. Of course, this view involves assumptions which are open to question.

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Quotations

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